

3RD EDITION

Doing
**VISUAL
ETHNOGRAPHY**

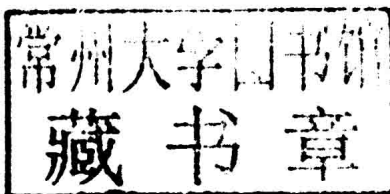


SARAH PINK



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Acknowledgements

When I wrote the first edition of *Doing Visual Ethnography* in the late 1990s I did so with the conviction that a visual approach to ethnographic research was emerging as a key methodological strand. The book's title, which was proposed by SAGE, sums up very well my intentions. In preparing it I drew together my own and other researchers' experiences along with theoretical and substantive interests in visual cultures and visual representations to propose a visual ethnographic methodology. In its original form this book was inspired greatly by my readings and viewings of and conversations about the work of visual anthropologists, sociologists and artists and since the publication of the first edition I have corresponded with and met many more ethnographers who share an enthusiasm for the visual – across disciplines and interdisciplinary fields, and internationally. Some of the research and images introduced in the second edition and in this third edition draw on the work of visual ethnographers who have dialogued with *Doing Visual Ethnography* in their publications and practice. I am greatly indebted to them for both appreciating my initial text and for providing, through their own practice, a new body of work that this new edition is, in turn, created to dialogue with.

The ideas and examples discussed in this book also draw extensively on my own theoretical and methodological research around visual and digital methods and media in recent years. Such reflections and discussions form part of my ongoing participation in fields including visual studies, media studies and everyday life research. Therefore while I do not directly re-publish any existing texts in this book, I do refer often to the ideas and arguments that have formed part of my research trajectory over the last ten or so years. In this sense most of the arguments and some of the examples given here are developed and discussed in more depth and detail or from different perspectives in other publications. On the one hand my purpose in mentioning this is to acknowledge the relationship between this book and existing work. However on the other it is to highlight that, where relevant, these existing works are always referenced so that readers can follow up theoretical discussions and methodological developments in more depth where needed. *Doing Visual Ethnography* is of course intended to make a clear statement about visual ethnography in its own right. However, it is by nature a book that seeks to do so by reviewing and analysing the wider field of practice in question,

therefore within it I have endeavoured to maintain a balance between its intellectual and practical engagement.

The book also draws extensively from my own experiences and would not have been possible without the support of the many people who have collaborated in my research, allowing me to photograph or video them over the last 20 or so years. A special thanks is due to all those who are mentioned in this particular book, but my appreciation goes beyond that. I cannot name here everyone in person, but I would like to extend these thanks to all those who have worked with me, for showing me aspects of their lives and, in doing so, allowing me to learn how to be an ethnographer. For the combination of visual and ethnographic training that has informed this work, and technical support in producing images for this book, I am indebted to the staff of the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester, where I trained as a masters student, the Centre for Anthropology and Computing at the University of Kent, the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, and multimedia developers at the University of Derby, all in the UK. At Loughborough, the IN3 in Barcelona (Spain), and RMIT University in Melbourne (Australia) where the ideas for this third edition began to form and have developed, I have benefitted from academic environments and the time needed to complete this work. For the intellectual inspiration to continue to work on *Doing Visual Ethnography* over the years leading to this third edition I would like to thank the many people who have invited me to speak about visual ethnography at workshops and conferences, the researchers and students who have attended these events, shown me their work, discussed ideas and asked inspiring questions. Finally, for the opportunity to keep developing visual ethnography in practice over the last years I would like to thank both the colleagues who have collaborated with me and believed that visual ethnography will deepen our understandings, and the various organisations who have funded my research: the ESRC which funded my PhD research into women and bullfighting in Spain; Unilever who funded my video ethnography work on the home; the Nuffield Foundation who funded my work on Slow cities; Construction Skills who funded the interdisciplinary work of my colleagues and myself into migrant workers in the construction industry; and the interdisciplinary LEEDR project, based at Loughborough University, which is jointly funded by the UK Research Councils' Digital Economy and Energy Programmes (grant number EP/I000267/1). For further information about LEEDR collaborating research groups and industrial partners, please visit www.leedr-project.co.uk.

About the author

Sarah Pink is Professor of Design and Media Ethnography at RMIT University, Australia, Professor of Social Sciences at Loughborough University, UK and Honorary Professor at the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University, Australia. She is known internationally for her work relating to digital visual methodology. Her books in this area include *Advances in Visual Methodology* (ed. 2012), *Visual Interventions* (ed. 2007), *The Future of Visual Anthropology* (2006) and *Working Images* (co-ed., 2004), as well as *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (2009) and *Ethnographic Research in the Construction Industry* (co-ed., 2013). Her methodological work is often developed in the context of research projects that seek to connect theoretical scholarship with applied research, which explores questions including digital media, everyday life, sustainability and ways of knowing.

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Introduction

Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work and everyday lives. They inhabit and inspire our imaginations, technologies, texts and conversations. As mobile media become increasingly ubiquitous images are embedded in the digital architectures of the environments we move through in our everyday routes. The visual is therefore inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, time, space, place, reality and truth. Ethnographic research is likewise intertwined with visual technologies, images, metaphors and ways of seeing. When ethnographers produce photographs or video, these images, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic knowledge. Images are indeed part of how we experience, learn and know as well as how we communicate and represent knowledge. In research contexts images may inspire conversations, conversation might invoke images; conversation and performances visualise and draw absent printed or digital images into their narratives through verbal descriptions and references to them. Likewise just as an image might invoke a memory of an embodied affective experience, experiences also inspire images. Images are thus an inevitable part of the experiential environments we live and research in; *Doing Visual Ethnography* is an invitation to engage with images, technologies and ways of seeing and experiencing as part of the ethnographic process.

Why do we need Visual Ethnography? —

Photography, video and web-based media are increasingly integral elements of the work of ethnographers. It could in fact be argued that it would be difficult to be a contemporary ethnographer without engaging with these media forms and environments and the practices associated with them. We use (increasingly digital) media in doing ethnographic research, we seek to develop understandings of the meanings and experiences that images and visual and media practices have in other people's lives, and our very fieldwork sites may cross online and offline contexts. In these roles visual and digital media are part of the ways we constitute ethnographic knowledge, as well as being used to create representations of

ethnographic knowledge. As such, visual ethnographic media and materials offer us forms of continuity between fieldwork in academic and applied research contexts that other media cannot. It is now almost inevitable that as ethnographers we will encounter and benefit from digital visual technologies and images in the course of our research and scholarly practice. We therefore need to understand how they become implicated in the production and dissemination of the ways of knowing that are part of the ethnographic process.

Along with their growing prevalence in ethnographic practice, visual methods and media are also part of the way many of us learn to become ethnographers. For instance, visual methods are taught as topics of university courses in subdisciplines such as visual anthropology and visual sociology, as well as in advanced research training workshops. There is additionally an increasingly global spread of conferences and seminars that focus on visual methods. Yet while visual ethnography might be said to have grown from the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, it is by now definitely not restricted to them. The benefits of a visually oriented ethnographic approach are increasingly recognised in other disciplines including geography as well as in interdisciplinary fields such as consumer research, health studies, education studies, media studies, organisation studies, design research, buildings research and in schools of art. I find myself writing this third edition of *Doing Visual Ethnography* in a context where there is now a wealth of existing literature about visual methods, selected elements of which I discuss in the following chapters of this book. This literature is increasingly spread across academic disciplines and informed by a range of methodological approaches. This context is a stark contrast to the late 1990s when I set about creating the first edition of this book. At that time I believed that visual ethnography was an emergent field that needed to be brought somehow into vision. I did not then have the sense that I do now of this being part of a growing and dynamic international and interdisciplinary field of practice.

This book is primarily for researchers from across 'ethnographic' disciplines and interdisciplinary fields who wish to incorporate audiovisual media into their research practice. It would be impossible to list the range of disciplines such practices would appeal to but, for instance, I would include researchers locating themselves in disciplines as seemingly diverse as those mentioned above. The book is also for visual media practitioners who seek a deeper understanding of how ethnographic research may inform their work. This includes on the one hand photographers, video makers and digital artists. On the other, it refers to scholars and practitioners for whom the visual forms a central element of their work, for instance in fields such as art therapy and phototherapy. My interest in engaging with practitioners and scholars from these fields is not simply based on the idea that they might benefit from the approach of visual ethnography. Rather, these are also disciplines from whose scholarship and practices I have learned since I began to write about visual ethnography.

A shifting context for *Doing Visual Ethnography*

To understand what doing visual ethnography means today, we need to understand something of where it has come from. To contextualise this here I account for its recent history. During the last two decades I have worked with photography, video and web-based media in my own ethnographic work, through periods of technological and theoretical innovations and 'turns'. In the late 1980s proponents of the then 'new ethnography' introduced ideas of ethnography as fiction and emphasised the centrality of subjectivity to the production of knowledge. Anthropology, the discipline in which my work began, experienced a 'crisis' through which positivist arguments and realist approaches to knowledge, truth and objectivity were challenged (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). These ideas paved the way for the visual to be increasingly acceptable in ethnography as it was recognised that ethnographic film or photography were essentially no more subjective or objective than written texts and thus gradually became acceptable to (if not actively engaged with by) most mainstream researchers. During the 1990s new innovations in visual technology, critical postmodern theoretical approaches to subjectivity, experience, knowledge and representation, a reflexive approach to ethnographic fieldwork methodology, and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity invited exciting new possibilities for the use of photographic technologies and images in ethnography. Emerging from that context, at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a flurry of new literature about and practical work involving visual methodologies. Traversing the social sciences and humanities these developments grew from social anthropology (Ruby 2000a; Banks 2001; Grimshaw 2001; Pink, Kürti and Afonso 2004; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2004; El Guindi 2004; MacDougall 2005; Pink 2006), sociology (Emmison and Smith 2000; O'Neill 2002; Pole 2004; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Halford and Knowles 2005), and geography (Rose 2001), (see Pink 2006, Chapter 2). Collectively these texts set a new scene for visual methods in an intellectual climate where the impact of the postmodern turn had been assessed and put to rest leaving as its legacy, amongst other things, the reflexive approach to ethnographic and visual research that these works insist on. It was from that context that the second edition of *Doing Visual Ethnography* emerged, through three key influences. First, an enthusiasm for exploring new interdisciplinary themes, connecting ethnography and arts practice (e.g. da Silva and Pink 2004; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2004; Schneider and Wright 2005; Bowman, Grasseni, Hughes-Freeland and Pink 2007) and recognising that visual research must also accommodate embodiment and the senses (e.g. O'Neill 2002; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2004; MacDougall 2005; Pink 2006, 2009). Second, a new emphasis on research about and training in methodology and ethical scrutiny emanating from the institutional requirements now made by funding bodies and universities. This context on the one hand encouraged innovative methodologies. On the other it emphasised the importance of ensuring ethical practice through external scrutiny,

and as such in ways often seemingly quite different from those suggested by the self-scrutiny of the reflexive ethnographer. In this environment visual ethnographers needed to be not just self-reflexive about their methods, but also conversant about them in institutional languages (Prosser et al. 2008; Clarke 2012). Finally, visual ethnography began to emerge as an applied as well as an academic practice (Pink 2006, 2007a). These shifts continue to frame the writing of this third edition of *Doing Visual Ethnography*. Yet they are also re-shaped by the further changes and 'turns' of the latter part of the first decade of the twenty-first century. When I was writing the second edition of this book, it was clear that a *visual* ethnography was fast encompassing a digital and web-based form of doing ethnography. Yet, there was still much that could be said about the doing of visual ethnography that did not need to be understood as digital practices. This remains the case to some extent today as we embark on the second decade of the twenty-first century, but with some important differences. Visual ethnography is now a practice which, in my experience, rarely involves the use of analogue cameras, that in some way or other nearly always involves the use of computing equipment and web-based media, and is practised in a context where sometimes ethnographers and research participants have access to very similar technologies. While of course this latter point needs to be qualified by the acknowledgement that global and national inequalities and other forms of difference mean that of course we do not all have equal access to the same media and technologies, the equipment that is needed to do a visual ethnography is no longer incredibly specialised (although some visual ethnographers innovate with highly specialised equipment). On the other hand, using visual methods in ethnographic practice does not have to involve new media, as even recent examples (e.g. Grasseni 2012; Hogan and Pink 2012) show that using printed maps, paper, pens, pencils and other 'old' technologies also make for visual ethnographic methods. Those readers who are holding this very book in its printed form as they read will be experiencing an 'old' materiality that persists in the present. While other readers will be accessing these words and images through digital technologies, perhaps a laptop, tablet computer or smart phone, and developing a different relationship to its written and visual elements as well as the web-based materials it provides links to.

Contemporary ways of doing visual ethnography are also framed by a series of wider shifts that I have argued elsewhere (Pink 2012b) create the context in which visual research methodologies are more generally being shaped. In the introduction to my edited book *Advances in Visual Methodology* (Pink 2012a, 2012b) I discuss these themes, which include the new technological context noted above as well as a series of theoretical turns, leading to a focus on concepts of practice, place and the senses (all themes that I also write about in relation to sensory ethnography (Pink 2009)). Indeed the focus on the senses that became consolidated during the early twenty-first century, necessitates a re-situating of 'visual ethnography' in relation to its arguments and priorities – a question I begin to address in terms of how sensory scholars might engage visual methods in my

book *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Pink 2009) and take up from the perspective of visual ethnography in Chapter 2 of this book. The increasing importance of non-representational (see e.g. Thrift 2008) and 'more-than-representational' (Lorimer 2005) approaches in human geography and in anthropology (see Ingold 2011) demands that we re-conceptualise the ways that we think of the role of images in the world and invites an approach to the visual that departs from conventional cultural studies treatments (see Ingold 2010a; Pink 2011a). Simultaneously, we have seen a further shift towards public and applied visual research and scholarship. Visual methods and media are increasingly engaged in applied research in anthropology and cognate disciplines (Pink 2007b, 2011b, 2012a; Mitchell 2011). As is evident in the examples of recent work I draw on in the discussions in the following chapters, an increasing amount of recent visual ethnography practice is part of this move towards a more engaged, participatory, collaborative and public form of visual scholarship.

Visual ethnography as practiced is therefore shaped by a range of interrelated influences, including disciplinary trajectories and commitments (which are discussed in Chapter 1), theoretical understandings of the meaning and potentials of images and media, technological possibilities, researcher's skills, biographies, subjectivity and reflexivity, and relations of power (see Chapter 2), the research question being addressed and ethical issues (Chapter 3). They are moreover framed by the ways that we define our research contexts and environments, the ways these change and how these are attended to by other scholars and researchers. As demonstrated by Figures 0.1, 0.2 and 0.3, these different elements come together in different ways in relation to different localities, identities, temporalities and technologies. Yet, in making this point I also wish to emphasise that earlier examples of visual ethnography practice do not become redundant as new technologies emerge. Indeed, as we see in Figure 0.1, in the year 2000 themes of identity, technologies, texts and locality are equally important as they are in 2005 in Figure 0.2, and in 2011 in Figure 0.3. The temporality of these images progressively encompasses the digital materialities that are now part of many people's everyday lives. Yet Figure 0.1 remains equally relevant today as it was in 2000.

As these examples suggest, contemporary fieldwork domains, however we construct them, are saturated with visual images, practices of image making and of looking. Of course none of these are closed research environments, but constructed as research sites. They show how visual ethnography methods are applicable across a range of interconnected domains of human experience. Moreover, much of the visual ethnography research I show in the following chapters, happens in movement crossing such domains in multiple ways (see also Pink 2009, 2012d; Pink and Leder Mackley 2012).

As this brief overview makes clear, the field of visual methods and methodology is burgeoning in a number of directions. While in 2001 when the first edition of *Doing Visual Ethnography* was published it was one of a handful of books about visual research, it now offers one among a set of related and contrasting approaches



Master Caravela. © Olivia da Silva 2000

Figure 0.1 Master Caravela is a member of the fishing community in Matosinhos (Portugal) represented in Olivia da Silva's photographic project, *In the Net* (2000). Da Silva uses anthropological methods to inform her photographic practice, writing how 'As a participant observer I worked closely with the subjects of my portraits as they lived out their everyday lives to access the personal and domestic arenas of fishing communities and to record individual histories and narratives' (see da Silva and Pink 2004). The relationship between arts practice and visual ethnography is a two-way process, while visual ethnographic practices can inform photographic representations, the visual practices of documentary artists also provide new and inspiring examples for visual ethnographers.

to encountering the visual in our social, material and sensory worlds. In Chapter 1, I outline this context as it has emerged across disciplines and methodologies and as such situate visual ethnography within a growing field of visual research practice. In the remainder of this Introduction I set out my agenda, through a discussion of the relationship of theory, methodology and method in this book. As should become clear, *Doing Visual Ethnography* is not a methods text. Rather it is a methodology book: my aim is to bring together the theoretical and practical elements of visual approaches to learning and knowing about and in the world, and communicating these to others.



'David and Anne show me a print of their plans for the community garden'. © Sarah Pink 2005

Figure 0.2 As part of my research about a community garden project in a UK Slow City (Cittaslow town) I photographed research participants in ways that were significant for them and their projects. In this photograph David and Anne show a print of some digital photographs of the type of path that they and other committee members wished to have in the community garden they were developing.

Theory, methodology and method in *Doing Visual Ethnography*

The relationship between theory and method is important for understanding any research project. Similarly, an awareness of the theoretical underpinnings of visual research methods is crucial for understanding how those images and the processes through which they are created are used to produce ethnographic knowledge. Such questions have long since been debated in the literature on visual research methods. Earlier texts were criticised for being 'centred on how-to manuals of method and analysis working within a largely unmediated realist frame (e.g. Collier and Collier 1986)' (Edwards 1997a: 33). Such works, like Prosser's notions of 'an image-based research methodology' (1996), tended to propose prescriptive frameworks that aimed to distance, objectify and generalise, and therefore detract from the very qualities and potentials that the ambiguity and expressivity (see Edwards 1997a) of visual images offers ethnography. In its first edition *Doing Visual Ethnography* along with other new volumes published at the beginning of the twenty-first century (e.g. Banks 2001; Pink, Kürti and Afonso 2004) signified a departure from this scientific and realist paradigm towards a new approach to making and understanding



Figure 0.3a The boat in the port

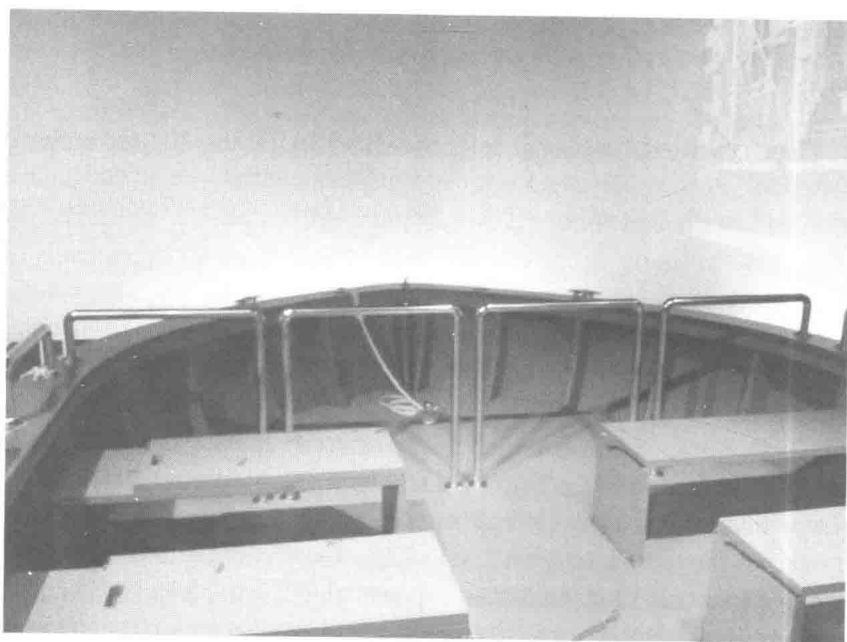


Figure 0.3b The virtual boat in the lighthouse