<e
visual ethnography

ARTICLES

FRANCESCA BAYRE
UNIVERSITAT OBERTA DE CATALUNYA, SPAIN
UNIVERSITAT DE BARCELONA, SPAIN

KRISTA HARPER
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST, USA

ANA ISABEL AFONSO
UNIVERSIDADE NOVA DE LISBOA, PORTUGAL

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY FROM THE DIGITAL TO THE HANDMADE. AN INTRODUCTION

FRANCESCA BAYRE

teaches Etnography, Communication and Culture, and Image and Culture at UOC (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya)
fbayre@uoc.edu

KRISTA HARPER

is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA.
kharper@anthro.umass.edu

ANA ISABEL AFONSO

is Professor Auxiliar at Department of Anthropology, FCSH - Universidade Nova de Lisboa, and Integrated Researcher at CICS.NOVA (Interdisciplinary Centre of Social Sciences).
ai.afonso@fcsh.unl.pt

Participatory visual methods are changing the way anthropologists forge new knowledge and interact with informants in the field, creating possibilities for intimate and public-engaged inquiry. This approach brings the visual and digital production process into a participatory action research (PAR) framework. Participatory visual methodologies include PhotoVoice, participatory video, digital storytelling, and visual archival research, among others. These techniques produce rich visual and narrative data, but also open other paths to a 'shared anthropology', guided by participant interests and priorities, putting the methods literally in the hands of the participants themselves. These methodologies and forms of communication appeal to wide and diverse audiences, deploying knowledge beyond the academy. It also allows the collective production of knowledge in more sensory and sensitive domains, exploring new levels of expression beyond verbalization. The greater intimacy that these methods allow and the possibilities for communicating to a wider range of interlocutors raises new ethical and methodological questions. How can visual ethnographers open up their research process at different stages to foster a kind of "shared anthropology," as proposed by Jean Rouch? How does the introduction of these methods produce a shift in the research process and the role of the ethnographer, taking it in new and unexpected directions?

In the contemporary world, visual and digital information is produced and disseminated faster and broader than ever (even if in many contexts, inequality of access to information and communication technologies remains an important element to take into account. In recent debate on "digital visual engagements," Grasseni and Walter (2014) question "whether digital media are *per se* participatory, and further, whether participatory digital media are *per se* politically engaging." Some of our initial queries in this direction were: how should anthropologists glean knowledge from the visual materials participants are producing? How can we make use of visual insights--from handmade drawings to digital video clips, captured with sophisticated camera--in order to foster multisensory research and enable research participants to tell stories alongside the ethnographer?

This collection first took shape when the three co-editors organized a panel on Participatory digital and visual methods (Panel 036, "Participatory visual and digital research in anthropology: engagement and innovation") at the 2014 EASA meetings in Tallinn. We were drawn together by our common interest in using images throughout the research process: as a visual elicitation tool, as a form of data and creative expression, and as a way of communicating anthropological knowledge to new audiences. Harper was excited by Bayre's participatory approach to research with images from colonial archives (Bayre and Valenciano-Mañé 2014). Bayre, in turn, invited Harper to speak about her book (Gubrium and Harper 2013) in a visual anthropology seminar at University of Barcelona.

Harper and Afonso had worked together on a Photovoice research project with urban gardeners in Lisbon, Portugal (Harper and Afonso 2016), having found each other through Afonso's co-edited volume *Working Images* (Pink, Kürti, and Afonso, 2004). The three of us put out a call for panel presenters in the hope of building a community of anthropologists interested in the potential for visual methodologies to foster a deeper form of participation and collaboration with the communities we study.

We learned that we were not alone in this hope: anthropologists, photographers, filmmakers, and curators from around Europe answered our call. We spent a full day in Tallinn sharing and discussing our projects. Our audience posed many challenging questions that have informed our thinking in the time since the panel. Some audience members asked us to consider the potential for the "tyranny of participation" (Cooke and Kothari 2001), for example, focusing on the power relations that reappear like a many-headed Hydra even in well-intentioned participatory projects. The final debate, fueled by the discussants, presented interesting topics for reflection. Dorle Dracklé sorted out the power of images, and conversely, the ethical dangers of visual research. Beate Engelbrecht, underlined the subtle difference between *cooperation* and *collaboration*, inviting panelists to reflect whether those two dimensions (one more technical, the other more participatory) could act in the field as parallel or convergent goals.

Following the conference, we continued to encounter scholars using participatory visual research in varied and innovative ways, employing diverse visual techniques (drawings, photos, archives, and videos) in diverse research settings from Brazil to Iran to Angola. The result is this special issue. Contributors in this issue creatively deploy visual methodologies, from using digital cameras to capture photos and videos to hand-sketching ideas and observations with a simple pencil and paper.

This leads us to question to what extent handmade drawings or digital images have the power to *re*-present our observations as researchers, and also *re*-inforce the concerns of research participants in a way that linear texts can not attain. Furthermore, how can the visual material generated in the field, *with* participants, can be also used *by* and *for* those same participants?

Martin Gruber's article begins by exploring the historical foundations of participatory and indigenous media production in anthropology. He then describes video workshops with village residents in Angola, Namibia, and Botswana and offers fine-grained insights on Participatory Ethnographic video as a process. Drawing inspiration from indigenous media around the world, Gruber and his partners integrated collaboration from planning the film projects to shooting, editing, and holding community screenings. Gruber takes a special interest in interrogating the "tyranny of participation" (Cooke and Kothari 2001) as it manifests itself in participatory video.

He acknowledges that one can never "escape" power relationships in research entirely. Nevertheless, Gruber shows the village filmmakers' agency as media producers in their decision to make fictional films as a way of presenting critical views to local political leaders and their ways of presenting his position as a foreign ethnographer within the frame of their own films.

In the video section of this issue, Gruber also contributes one of the videos pro led in the article, Honey (Hochi), co-directed by Adelina Antónia, Martin Gruber, Miguel S. Hilário, Henriques Bino Job, Fatima José & Evaristo Quintas. This video is the product of a participatory filmmaking workshop in which villagers in the highlands of Central Angola discussed the future of their region and the ecological, economic, and cultural value of the honey they collect.

Shireen Walton brings the discussion about participation to the digital landscape, with the theoretical/methodological proposition of the anthropologist as curator for digital ethnographic research on Iranian photobloggers. To explore and challenge the role of the anthropologist towards a collective epistemological frame, to what has been called "knowing beyond the self" (Horst, 2016:7), Walton becomes the curator of an online exhibition of Iranian Photography, constructing the digital field for her research.

Anne De Louis presents the results of her Photovoice research conducted with students and teachers at a German-language high school in Transylvania in Romania. She shows how youth use images to represent the changing ethnic composition of a region that once had a large German population and continues to value its "Saxon" heritage. De Louis presents the contrast between students' images of the past, represented by folk architecture, costumes, and heritage sites, and their aspirations for a cosmopolitan future, represented by German language proficiency, western products, and multicultural youth. While students at this prestigious school unconsciously replicate hierarchies of value that place German ethnic culture above that of Romanian and Gypsy in their imagery, they also use the Photovoice process to subtly critique school discipline and to express the idea that the region's inhabitants are legitimate inheritors of local Saxon heritage whether or not they are ethnic Germans. De Louis presents a compelling case for the use of participatory visual methodologies with youth.

Moving from digital photography to hand-made drawings, Karina Kuschnir describes how she mobilized her anthropology students to improve their powers of observation through drawing (and vice-versa). In her paper, she explores the potential of ethnographic drawings during fieldwork, based on this teaching experiment and supported by a longstanding tradition in the history of anthropology. Kuschnir cites the potential for hand-sketching as a way of building rapport and humanizing the researcher in the eyes of participants as benefits of using sketchbooks and drawings in ethnography.

But beyond that instrumental dimension, Kuschnir demonstrates the heuristic capacity of drawings to express the point of view of the researcher and spur dialogue in a way that texts cannot, shedding light into two central dimensions of drawing: the inner/outer one and the researcher/participant one. The students' drawings selected from Kuschnir's course are vivid illustrations of this potential participatory dimension of drawings from an applied anthropology perspective.

Aina Azevedo and Manuel João Ramos reflect anthropologically on the drawing practice, based on discussions from a workshop dedicated to "ethnographic drawing" in the University of Aberdeen. The workshop brought together anthropologists and artists to share their experiences of drawing in their respective fields. Their collaboration generated new questions to consider, in line with recent research conducted by Tim Ingold (present in the workshop) who conceives of drawing as a "knowledge from the inside", meaning by that a two-way immersive and endless mental practice (from the outside world to the hand, through the brain, and back again). In Ingold's sense, drawing practice could be envisaged as a powerful performative and communicational thinking tool, allowing the researcher to complement writing, interact with informants in the field, and to collaboratively map, exchange, and exhibit what and how the observer "sees" in the eyes of the observed (Ingold 2013). Like Kuschnir, in the previous paper, Aina Azevedo and Manuel João Ramos argue that drawings in anthropological practice are "good to think" (Lévi-Strauss 1962) and they address the specificities of "low-tech" drawing in contrast with photography and film.

This issue includes also two photo-essays, resulting from a participatory approach to photography in two different research projects. In the first one, Joana Roque de Pinho addresses the concept of *change* in collaboration with 27 farmers living inside Cantanhez National Park in southern Guinea-Bissau. They participated as photographers (even if none of them had used a camera before) and co-researchers, using images and storytelling to explore the idea of change (*mudansa*) in the region. Although the research project was initially focused on climate change, Roque de Pinho decided to approach the issue indirectly to avoid having local farmers simply echo the environmentalist discourses that they thought outsiders wanted to hear. This shift in the research opened up the possibility of an expanded view on local narratives of change. In this photo-essay, Roque De Pinho emphasizes the strategies of representation of the participants, like staging the past, to give a broader view on the local perception of change in its social, economic, ecological and cultural complexity, beyond dominant environmentalistic narrative. The second photo-essay is the result of a double collaboration. In the first collaboration, two anthropologists and a photographer/social scientist, Gilles Reckinger, Diana Reiners and Carole Reckinger, decided to start a project about migration and agriculture in Southern Italy.

They wanted to follow migrants' experience beyond Lampedusa, after they are brought to the mainland and start a new life. This collaboration interlinked with a second level of collaboration--the one they established with five citrus workers in Calabria who migrated to Europe from several different African countries. Showing their everyday life from their perspective, the Bitter Oranges project developed into an exhibition travelling through Europe and North America, with the aim to show the bitter relationship between the control of migration and precarious labor market.

This special issue runs the spectrum of participatory image-making practices from handmade to digital, from sketching by hand to filmmaking and photoblogging. Recently, Tim Ingold (2013: 123) has discussed Leroi-Gourhan's (1993: 255) proposition that the use of machines represents the loss of a part of humanity, as a sort of post-human mind which has lost the link with the fingers. "In short, the button-pushing finger that operates the automatic machine is part of a hand that, although still anatomically human, has lost something of its humanity."

As scholars who came of age with Haraway's cyborg anthropology, we point instead to the ways that humans continue to create things, communicate, and extend their reach with both embodied hands and their technological prostheses (Haraway 1991). We recall the Latin etymology of digital, (*digitus,* finger), considering that depending on the use we give to them, both digital and handmade methods can be a way to "think with fingers" (as Leroi-Gourhan would say), to craft new shared knowledge, for the still challenging task of understanding our humanity. While one might think that the differences in visual technologies are great, we observe many common threads in these visual sensibilities across media and platforms in the following dimensions:

First, visual materials in general, and drawings in particular, can help to "objectify" (in the sense of making visible) the subjectivities of the researcher, and thus open up new dialogues with research participants. When anthropologists make the means of image-making available to research participants, they not only gain a new entry point to the "emic perspective," they also transform knowledge production itself and make collaborative analysis possible.

Second, contemporary anthropologists are reckoning with the new visual/virtual ubiquity of images. In a world saturated with an overwhelming flow of "easy images" (both "real" and virtual), we must attend to the ways in which images support participants' and academics' expression of concerns and social problems. As Collins and Durington (2014) point out in their work on "networked anthropology," we need a new kind of ethnographic reflexivity in an age when many of our research participants are already online, creatively repurposing our research in their own social media activities. Finally, our contributors highlight the power and ethics of images. We have all heard that "a picture is worth a thousand words" -- and yes, images are powerful in terms of narrative and as a descriptive device.

Handmade drawings are quite flexible in terms of its plasticity to incorporate research participants' insights. Digital technologies now facilitate the spread of images, photos, and video clips for both popular and scholarly audiences. But images can also be dangerous due to the power of perspective -- an image "taken" and a drawing "done" have in common the special capability of cropping the reality in a way that reflects a position (from the researcher) towards the reality being observed, a positionality which is most of the time intangible and offstage. By way of making a drawing and taking a photograph in the field, imagemakers not only try to *represent* what they think deserve to be observed and registered but they also show (expose) their inner (sometimes unconscious) feelings about it. In that sense images, especially when disseminated, can be extremely powerful, in what they reveal, denounce or criticize. The participatory approach to the production of images, as exemplified in the different contexts presented of this special issue, tends to give the researcher a deeper sense of context. By interacting with the participants in the process of visual data construction, the anthropologist may capture the multiple dimensions of images and better understand the ethical consequences of their exhibition and circulation.

REFERENCES

BAYRE, Francesca - VALENCIANO-MAÑÉ, Alba
2014   The biography of a visual archive: The production
        of hermic films in Spanish Guinea (1944-46).
        Visual Anthropology, *27* (4), 379-393.

COLLINS, Samuel Gerald - DURINGTON, Matthew Slover
2014   *Networked anthropology: A primer for
        ethnographers*. London: Routledge.

COOKE, Bill - KOTHARI, Uma
2001   *Participation: The new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.

GRASSENI, Cristina - WALTER, Florian
2014   Introduction. Digital visual engagements,
        Anthrovision 2.2 Accessed online, May 15-2016:
        http://anthrovision.revues.org/1445

GUBRIUM, Aline - HARPER, Krista
2013   *Participatory visual and digital methods.*
         Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast/Routledge.

HARAWAY, Donna
1991   *Simians, cyborgs, and women.* London: Routledge.

HARPER, Krista - AFONSO, Ana Isabel
2016   "We must cultivate our gardens": Urban agriculture,
         civic ecology, and global crisis in Lisbon, Portugal
         Anthropology in Action 23(1): 6-13.

HORST, Heather
2016   Being in fieldwork: Collaboration, digital media
         an ethnographic practice. In *eFieldnotes: The
         Makings of Anthropology in a Digital World.* Sanjek,
         Roger and Tratner, Susan (eds.). Philadelphia:
         University of Pennsylvania Press.

INGOLD, Tim
2013   *Making: Anthropology, archaeology, art and
         architecture.* London: Routledge.

LEROI-GOURAHN, André
1993   *Gesture and speech.* Cambridge, Massachusetts
         & London: MIT Press.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude
1962   *Le totémisme aujourd'hui.* Paris: Presses
         Universitaires de France.

PINK, Sarah - KÜRTI, László - AFONSO, Ana Isabel (eds.)
2004   *Working images: Visual research and representation
         in ethnography.* London: Routledge.