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AUDIOVISUAL AND DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY AT LEIDEN

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The nature of this book: A practical and theoretical guide

Worldwide, courses and specialisations on audiovisual and digital methods are proliferating. However, many still rely on textbooks written several decades ago. The time is ripe for a manageable, up-to-date, theoretical and practical guide that addresses in a comprehensive way the methodological connections across established and emergent fields such as sonic ethnography, digital media and visual anthropology. At Leiden, over the years we have developed collective and individual expertise in these fields, as well as a collective stance on how to deal with data management. This book brings together this practical and field-based expertise in a coherent volume. In teaching and field research, students and scholars encounter (audio) visual and digital 'data' not as separate entities, but all at the same time; accordingly, we provide a broad but succinct epistemological framework regarding how to sense, mediate and listen while also drawing, videoing and digitally interacting with the field – as modern ethnographers do. In this book we accompany the reader as they 'enskill' their senses, learning to see, listen and mediate, whether by drawing, filming or other digital and multimodal methods. We ground our approach firmly in ethnographic field research practice, encompassing visual ethnography, skilled vision, sonic ethnography, skilled listening and digital developments as aspects of current field engagements.

The authors of this book are all anthropologists and colleagues at Leiden University. Each is an expert in visual, digital or sonic ethnography. We developed the project for a handbook together and have reviewed each other's chapters.[1] The chapters can accordingly be read either as independent essays on a specific field or as component parts of a holistic approach that covers in a connected manner the following aspects of audiovisual and digital ethnography: learning to see and listen in the field; the mediation of the senses; doing anthropological fieldwork

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with video-making and audio-recording; observational filmmaking; multimodal anthropology; digital ethnography; interactive documentary; and, finally, the ethics and management of audiovisual and digital 'data.' The objective is to offer a much-needed, up-to-date and concise starting point for the student or academic practitioner, providing a broad but accessible, theoretically informed introduction to the fundamental skills for audiovisual ethnographic research and production in line with our teaching and research practice at Leiden. Building on ongoing collaborations across a tight-knit community of practice, in which each of the above-mentioned areas of expertise is embedded, we showcase the unique academic knowledge we have gathered on the theory and practice of visual, multimodal and digital ethnography. Consequently there are also theoretical and practical aspects of audiovisual and digital ethnography that we do not cover in this book, such as ethnographic photography, interactive installations and digital social media. In other words, ours is not a digital ethnography handbook in the sense that it is not a guide for doing ethnography in the digital world. In fact, while Chapter 8 focuses specifically on the anthropology *of* the digital (online ethnography, ethnography of virtual life, ethnography of digital users and communities, and in general ethnography conducted via social media), other chapters (and especially Chapters 2 to 4) aim to reconsider offline worlds as places to recapture and reflect on what we take for granted as online experiences.

The chapters are structured logically, beginning with a theory of vision and its integration in a complex sensorium before turning to sonic ethnography, with practical exercises for students to *learn to see and listen* during anthropological fieldwork. This is followed by incremental steps towards increasing technical complexity, including, for example, drawing and sketching as practical engagements with vision, through to using footage for ethnographic analysis and making observational and interactive documentaries. Unlike books focused predominantly on the visual, our attention to sonic and digital ethnography deepens and broadens our engagement with the senses and with digital media, enriching and diversifying a multimodal core perspective that is shared across this community of practice. The guide is designed to provide an ideal balance between theoretical overview, methodological reflection and empirical tips for the reader within every chapter.

In particular, this project addresses the advanced process of digitalisation in our discipline, understood both in terms of the fact that the sociocultural phenomena we investigate are increasingly digitally embedded and mediated, and in terms of the fact that ethnographic representation and co-production is itself *multimodally* embedded in diverse media. Our concern here is not to offer an anthropology *of* this digitalisation or 'the digital.' Instead, we present and discuss methods for an anthropology *with media* (audio, visual and digital). We offer a methodology for constructing ethnographic knowledge with media that is steeped in both fieldwork and anthropological theory, preparing the reader to critically analyse or adopt the next new media from a strong theoretical standpoint. In doing so, we take mediation back to basics. Methodological sophistication does not come solely through the novelty of the media; rather, it emerges from modes of interaction and reflection

by the user. This can occur with any media, and this approach has the advantage that it will not age as mediums evolve. We do address new technologies and multimodality, not for the sake of the newness of technology but rather because of the epistemological node we wish to address – namely, the key anthropological issue of deriving knowledge from fieldwork.

Accordingly, we pay special attention to the 'doing' of audiovisual and digital ethnography. For example, each chapter contains one or more text-boxes that address specifics in an introductory manner (for example, the use of microphones in sonic ethnography), suggest simple field exercises (on how to develop a reflexive sense of visual enskillment, for instance) or refer to in-depth analysis of additional readings and recommended viewings. Finally, we address in a critical but constructive way the increased encroachment of auditing agendas on anthropological 'data' (see Chapter 9), building on the leading stance taken with the Leiden manifesto on data management in anthropology (Pels et al. 2018), which resulted in the European Association of Social Anthropology's statement on data governance (EASA 2020). We provide specific references to procedural examples of data management and informed consent, referring (with links and via the book website) to additional electronic materials such as film repositories and interactive documentary platforms, as well as relevant protocols and codes of conduct such as the Leiden Anthropology Data Management Plan.[2]

An open issue for our community of practice is how to assess audiovisual and digital outcomes of ethnographic research. The AAA Statement on Ethnographic Visual Media pledged that "committees tasked with appraising the significance of visual media as academic contributions to the discipline – to teaching, scholarly research and applied anthropology – can benefit from evaluative criteria" (AAA 2002, 305). This advice by the Society for Visual Anthropology helped acknowledge that non-textual forms of representation should be considered as valid academic outcomes of ethnographic research, but visual anthropologists and students worldwide still lack institutional agreements regarding academic standards for evaluating and accrediting audiovisual publications. These shortcomings complicate applying for academic funding, getting audiovisual productions acknowledged as academic publications (for example, for tenure cases) and discussing evaluation criteria for non-textual student productions. Since multimodality is increasingly central to anthropology, the need to find common ground here is crucial, as already discussed in 2004 by MacDougall, Henley, Ragazzi, Meyknecht and Postma in Leiden and in the 2013 IUAES Commission on Visual Anthropology forum. We build on these discussions for assessment of multimodal outputs developed at the Leiden Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology.

Social science scholars wishing to train in audiovisual and digital ethnographic methods will also find here concrete examples situated within a well-informed theoretical framework, which can contextualise visual methods within the broad and increasingly complex canvas of sensory and digital specialist literature. Professionals and practitioners in the fields of design, development, social pedagogy and the creative arts might also find this book a good starting point for training in audiovisual and digital ethnographic methods.

The content of this book

Many significant anthropological insights into the understanding of vision as a form of skilled learning and situated practice come from professional contexts, as well as from broader terrains of daily schooling of the eye, which are more evanescent and difficult to pin down. Before we even begin to focus on the mediation of (visual) perception through specific technologies and recording equipment, we have to become aware that this process is part of a broader skilled interaction with our senses and our material, social and relational environments. There is more that connects than divides sensory, digital and (audio) visual in ethnographic practice. We begin with *learning to see*. In the theorisation of "skilled visions" (Grasseni 2004), Grasseni emphasised the plurality and diversity of modes of visual attention. Skilled visions (in the plural) are dynamic, transient, apprenticeship-learnt, context-dependent and difficult to pin down in analytical terms. A couple of decades later, learning to see is being studied in many multisensorial contexts, where both technology and embodiment "mediate" skilled vision (Grasseni and Gieser 2019). Participant observation in the field affords the development of a skilled vision approach when it focusses, for example, on the collaboration of two or more senses to achieve perceptual acuity, with or without the intervening mediation of specific apparatus. This in turn can consist of recording media but also tools for specific practices such as hunting, bird watching or carpentry (as we can see in detail in the work of a number of ethnographers mentioned in Chapter 2). This chapter seeks to introduce the reader to the notion of "learning to see" as a form of educated ethnographic practice. Learning to see in cultural and social ways results in the formation of aesthetic and ethical sensibilities, and awareness of them is therefore essential in the toolbox of ethnographic skills that an anthropologist develops in the field. The chapter also suggests some simple exercises to develop this sensibility.

However, sensing is more than seeing. During the last decade, critiques of the "despotism of the eye" (Henley 2007) have seen calls for a turn towards "sounded" anthropology (Samuels et al. 2010). Andrew Littlejohn's chapter introduces students to the possibilities of "sonic ethnography," defined as the recording, editing and presentation of anthropologically informed works of sound-based media. Although overlapping with ethnomusicology, sonic ethnography focuses less on music than the non-musical, other-than-human voices composing our shared acoustic environments. By contrast with written studies of these voices, sonic ethnography asks what we can learn by making, and listening to, ethnographies in sound itself. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, tape recordings, CDs, digital audio files, single or multi-channel installations and sound maps. Chapter 3 begins with a brief overview of sonic ethnography's emergence from earlier traditions of documentary sound recording. Here, a number of key theoretical concepts – most notably "soundscape" – are also introduced and critically discussed. Littlejohn then theorises what kind of knowing sonic ethnography produces, drawing on recent work in sound studies (Goh 2017; Lavender 2017; Voegelin 2014) and ontological

anthropology (Kohn 2015). Sonic ethnography, he suggests, is not only the exploration of how we generate and interpret soundscapes. It is also a kind of "ontological poetics" (Kohn 2015; Stevenson and Kohn 2015) opening us to other ways of perceiving and thinking the world and its composition. Composing such works, of course, requires basic familiarity with sound recording techniques. His next section details key technical considerations, including specialist terminology. He then discusses various considerations in the field –distance from sound sources, degree of focus, bodily movement, etc. – before providing several exercises easily adaptable to different projects. Finally, he gives examples from existing works that provide different approaches to editing, both aesthetic and technical.

Having considered learning to see and learning to listen, Mark Westmoreland introduces multimodality and particularly the notion of *ethno-graphy*. The etymology of ethnography as "people writing" is often used to highlight and problematise the role of writing in anthropology. In these discussions, ethnography has been alternatively described as "inscription" (Geertz 1973), "transcription" (Clifford 1990), "textualization" (Clifford and Marcus 1986) and "translation" (Emerson et al. 2011), which emerge through a process of reassembling various kinds of "fieldnotes" (Emerson et al. 2011; Sanjek 1990). But the Greek root *grapho* – "to scratch or carve" – necessarily broadens the categories of graphing to include drawing, painting, mapping and image-making in general, as captured in such words as photography, cinematography and cartography, not to mention the graphic arts, graphic design and graphic novel. Thus, at its root, ethnography suggests a much more diverse set of mediating activities than captured in the idea of "writing culture."

Has multimodality somehow resolved decades of dead-end debates about words and images by simply putting them back together? Whereas many anthropologists are rightfully shifting debates about multimodality to new forms of digital accessibility and networked interconnectivity (Collins et al. 2017), it is also instructive to rethink the underlying techno-fetishisation within the multimodal discourse (Takaragawa et al. 2019). Shifting registers of image-making from automatic processes of film and photography to manual forms of documentation with pen and paper, through the modalities of writing field notes and making field sketches, this chapter discusses a series of pedagogical experiments that incorporate drawing as a method for cultivating "skilled vision" (Grasseni 2004). Chapter 4 offers a series of drawing exercises designed to show students new ways of perceiving the world, new insights about modes of mediation and new understandings about visual intelligence. A graphic approach is methodologically and conceptually generative: drawing offers a way of "being mindful and open to the unfolding presence of that which is perceived" (Causey 2016, 12); it helps "to reconnect observation and description with the movements of improvisatory practice" (Ingold 2016, 2); its practice cultivates "interrelations between perception, creativity and skill" (Gunn 2009, xix); and its polysemic potential is conceptually generative (Taussig 2011).

Several chapters then work specifically with the affordances of video. Contemporary ethnography stresses reflexivity, situationality and multivocality, while audiovisual technology has simplified the earlier cumbersome registration

of sound and moving images. How has this redefined the potential of audiovisually supported event analysis? What are the current possibilities and challenges? In his chapter on "dialoguing events," Erik de Maaker returns to his ethnographic fieldwork on funerals in the Garo Hills of India. There, funerals are a prime ground for staging social relationships. Engaging the dead as well as super-human entities, these rituals allow for interactions that are either an answer to preceding ones, or engaged in with the expectation of these being reciprocated at a later moment in time. While these interactions are heavily codified, they also provide ample room for diverging interpretations. De Maaker's observations are participatory in the sense that he attended the funerals and made video recordings to then extend, refine and review his observations in the following weeks, months and years. Video recordings enabled close reading and analysis of attended events in dialogue with interlocutors. The audiovisual toolkit for "extended participatory observation" that thus came about allowed the events filmed to develop into dense ethnographic cases, which became central to his understanding of social cohesion among Garo. In Chapter 5, he discusses this research methodology and reflects on its implications, advantages and drawbacks.

Ethnography as a research method focuses broadly on the exploration of ideas, beliefs, conditions and sensations of research interlocutors. The ethnographer engages in a learning process with the intention to probe beyond one's own frame of reference, querying for unknown perspectives, interpretations and significances. Participant observation, as the research technique that is central to ethnography, foregrounds presence and experience, assuming that "being there" can generate insights into ideas, values, emotions and sensations of the research interlocutors which cannot otherwise be obtained. Yet events are fleeting, easily rendering observation transient. From early on in the inception of anthropology as an academic discipline, anthropologists have eyed the potential of film (moving images, once technically feasible in combination with sound) for 'archiving' social events (Gerbrands 1971; Griffiths 1996; Mead 2012). In addition, decades ago ethnographic filmmakers had already tried to tap into the potential of film for the elicitation of culturally specific meanings that were key to the analysis of the participant's life worlds.

This brings us to observational cinema as process, skill and method. As Metje Postma argues, most ethnographic documentary filmmakers (even those who do not label themselves as observational) agree that the practice of ethnographic documentary filmmaking as a fieldwork method centres on observational cinematic methods. This implies working as a (participant-) observer from an ethical stance based on collaborative relations that are negotiated with individuals or groups; unscripted recording and showing over telling. This approach focuses on following actions and events unfolding in time, as they are lived by one or more individuals or in the community. The positioning and presence of the filmmaker are also implicitly or explicitly made clear. Collaborative relations require negotiations and mutual agreement on the conditions of the protagonists, the anthropological interests and intentions of the ethnographer, allowing for the intrusive presence of a camera (person) and its one-way, inquisitive eye. From the perspective of the audiovisual

ethnographer, the practice of observational filmmaking as a method consists of cinematographic considerations and of a reflective process that guides the selections in time, space and activity generating the film footage. Postma identifies several dimensions to this reflective process which, she suggests, are informed by ethnographic considerations, albeit through a process that is often experienced as intuitive, topical, analytical and cinematographic. It requires a socialisation and sensitisation of the body and the mind as result of the development of personal relations and ethnographic understanding, which will eventually produce the narrative structure and the film sequences. In Chapter 6, observational cinema is approached as a skill and sensibility that requires training and experience, on top of the needed technical skills and understanding of cinema, to appreciate the main factors that may play a role in the selection process in space, time and topic. The discussion of these factors is supported by concrete examples and film fragments by ethnographic filmmakers.

Shifting from video to digital methods, we consider the boundary between "documentary" and "fiction". For example, Littlejohn is very clear that sonic ethnographies are fictions that are still "truthful." The same can be said of observational cinema and of the ambition of interactive documentaries. Federico De Musso looks at the new affordances that interactive documentaries grant to ethnography. Chapter 7 first reviews the existing literature on interaction in both media and game studies; second, it offers key examples to understand the typologies and affordances of interactive documentary; third, it discusses the possibility that these affordances bring to anthropological research, with reference both to research design and publication. The chapter introduces the reader to the game, media and visual anthropology literature on audience and users' interaction. Game scholars point out how digital gaming inaugurated new frontiers for experiential storytelling (Murray 2017) and for emotional – expressive and reflexive – users' engagement (Michael and Chen 2005). Furthermore, media scholars argue that interactive storytelling offers a rich array of interactive modes, which reframe both the ways users link narrative elements with each other, and how interaction bridges the gap between the audience and their world (Gaudenzi 2019; Nash et al. 2014).

Interactive documentary users overlap with the ideally engaged audience that visual anthropology posits (MacDougall 1998; Taylor 1996), actively co-producing the narration of the documentary. Following the theoretical review, the chapter analyses interactive documentaries such as *Highrise: Out My Window*, *Journey at the End of Coal*, *This Land*, *The Shirt on your Back* and *Pirate Fishing* to discern diverse levels and typologies of interactivity. These examples help explain the differences between interaction levels, the storytelling they entail and the different construction of reality they support (Aston and Gaudenzi 2012; Murray 2017; Nash 2014). Reflecting on the existing media-scape provides the reader with practical examples they can follow to understand, plan and produce interactive documentaries. The chapter then proposes a methodology to bridge interactive documentaries and ethnography. Explanations of the research design process will present how to

ideate potential media interactions through the lenses of fieldwork methodology, including examples of diagrams and workflows to map out the interactive media's structure and plan for shooting accordingly. The chapter also explains how to incorporate voices, notes, images and side-texts from the field in experiential and multilinear documentaries, thereby reshaping the boundaries of ethnography as a genre. Dedicated text-boxes provide further information on how to draw the interactive architecture. One box proposes three different exercises to explore multilinear narrative strategies and reflect over the specific workflow of multilinear storytelling. Another box provides guidelines to experiment with immersive video making and to reflect upon its limits and potentials.

More generally, the 'digital turn' begs for inventive ways of 'deep hanging out' in the age of the Internet, as anthropologists refer to their immersive participatory method. It also calls for novel genres and formats to communicate the ethnographic experience of people and communities, now that all facets of life increasingly have become digitalised. In comparison with the fields of digital humanities and data science, however, we only recently see a burgeoning literature on digital ethnographic approaches (Hine 2015; Hjorth et al. 2017; Pink et al. 2016). Much of the early literature on digital ethnography focuses on the merits of anthropology's preferred methodological tool kit – ethnography – next to using the affordances of social media analysis, data scraping and other "digital born methods" (Rogers 2013, 19). The Internet proves to be one of the most important and exhilarating sites when it comes to exploring the constraints and challenges of using the ethnographic method in order to continue studying how people make sense of their lives, especially now that so much of that life has been extended online. However, the ethnographic method may also help expose how seemingly immaterial phenomena such as 5G, algorithms or 'the cloud' have very physical implications and matter deeply to people's everyday lives in ways that can and should be made visible. Moreover, a holistic approach can be retained in 'following the user' while they move from one social media platform or technological device to another, thereby studying which platform comes with which affordances and under which peculiar circumstances (see Madianou and Miller 2013, on "polymedia"). Bart Barendregt's chapter explores some of these new challenges in representing ethnographic findings in digital formats, recommending and reviewing techniques for 'deep hanging out' in digital spaces as an ethnographer. Although extremely adaptive to new field sites, digital ethnography confronts us with new ethical matters and the need for reflexivity over the questions of who or what makes data, who owns it, and when and where to follow people or content online without prior consent. In separate text boxes Chapter 8 offers three comprehensive accounts of how to do digital ethnography in practice: first, by studying layman interpretations of how sophisticated technologies work; second, data walks through which participants defining and critique the data surrounding them; and thirdly, co-design that may help raise questions about users' experience and the cultural values imbued in a product.

Finally, Marianne Maeckelbergh offers a narrative examination of the demands that are made of anthropologists working in the contemporary context of multiple

research audit practices, and how these do, or do not, fit with an audiovisual and digital ethnographic methodology. Through a discussion of recent changes in the Dutch research audit context, Chapter 9 explores three different processes that emerged to control the way researchers relate to their research materials: the invention of a bureaucratic instrument called the "Data Management Plan," the issuance of Dutch national guidelines for the archiving of academic research for faculties of Behavioural and Social Sciences and the passing of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) law in Europe. Maeckelbergh describes her experience of navigating these conflicting demands to reflect on how anthropologists can position themselves when faced with ethical and legal requirements that stem from very alien (to anthropologists) notions of what 'data' is, what research is and how research is done. She describes collective efforts made within the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University to translate and adapt a university-wide Data Management Plan to the discipline of anthropology, the efforts made by qualitative social scientists to define scientific integrity beyond a quantitative social science framework, and the challenges anthropologists face, especially visual anthropologists, if they are held to a highly restrictive data protection legislation designed for the likes of Google and Facebook. While the case described here is specific to the situation in the Netherlands (and Europe), similar dynamics exist anywhere anthropologists have to navigate their own sense of research ethics, the law and university policies – each of which may lead to different conclusions about what the ethical course of action is in the field. Drawing on examples from her own experience of doing research and making films among, with and about social movements, Chapter 9 illustrates the kinds of contradictions that these conflicting frameworks of data morality can generate for anthropologists.

Notes

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2 The Leiden Anthropology Data Management Plan and statement on Approved Informed Consent Procedures in Anthropological Research are available at: www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/social-behavioural-sciences/cultural-anthropology-and-development-sociology/research/guidelines-protocols–policies#data-management-policy.

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