Design Course

Visual Ethnography for Designers

Understand the design context

by
Prof. Nina Sabnani
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://dsource.in/course/visual-ethnography-designers

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-ethnography-designers/introduction

Introduction

In this course Visual Ethnography for Designers, you will learn about:
- Ethnography and visual ethnography in specific
- How ethnography is different from other research methods
- How designers can use ethnographic methods in their projects
- How to gather and analyse ethnographic data using visual methods
- Examples and case studies where visual ethnography has been used
- Further reading materials

Why is ethnography important for the practice of design?
Designers work with and for people, responding to their needs. Often they engage in the act of collaborative making. When designing for specific needs a designer is required to understand the cultural context of the user/ community/ customer. Ethnographic methods help in understanding their context.

We hope that by the end of this course, you will be able to use some of the methods mentioned here in your own projects. We are excited to begin!

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What is Ethnography

Ethnography is an investigation and the systematic recording of human cultures. Culture is defined by Massey as being "...made up of certain values, practices, relationships and identifications." Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behavior that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience, which is socially transmitted.

Ethnography is one of the qualitative methods used in anthropology, which is a study of human beings (in social, cultural and even biological contexts). As a method, it requires complete immersion of the researcher or ethnographer in the field among the participants (he) is studying, for a prolonged duration.

Here 'field' means the natural setting that forms the place of study, while subjects or participants are the people or community or group that you are interacting with and learning about.

The standard duration of an ethnographic study is a minimum of one year, where the researcher experiences at least one cycle of seasons. However this is not applicable when researchers are examining a particular event or activity. For example, the Ganesh festival, which is held only for 10 days, or festival of Holi, which takes place once a year for a day. In this case the researchers immerse themselves for the duration of the event but may spend a good amount of time before and after the event. Such events may be visited for several years many times to look for patterns.

Ethnographic research is synchronic, meaning observing events as they unfold in time. This method therefore becomes most suitable to study events and activities that are present, current and in vogue such as a study of artisans at work, marriage rituals etc. The study involves documentation although it goes beyond documentation to reflect on the activity and draw analysis from these reflections.

The earliest ethnographic study is attributed to Herodotus in the third century BCE. Herodotus, also known as the father of history learnt about cultures by travelling extensively and documenting traditions and sociopolitical practices among people.

Ethnography was employed by colonists to study and understand the local populations whom they referred to as natives. Examples of British ethnographers in colonial India include John Forbes Watson, John William Kaye, Sir Herbert Hope Risley and Verrier Elwin. Ethnography is sometimes termed as exploitative because of its colonial origins but contemporary ethnographers are countering this by engaging in collaborative ethnography. That is by involving the participants themselves in the study.

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When is visual ethnography most useful?
Traditionally, ethnography was referred to as writing about culture. Therefore the written description occupies an important place in an ethnographic study. Earlier, ethnographers used images as illustrations or visual proofs/ evidence of events and activities. But certain topics lend themselves better to visual explanations along with written ones. Video and photography would be the most suitable to explain how artisans craft their products by hand rather than written descriptions of the same. For example, crafts like pottery or embroidery.

Visual ethnography can be explained as the use of visual methods like photography, video and sketching to gather data and express the reality of a group of people. In visual ethnography, you can research the visual and/ or research with visuals. The objective is to describe people and their activities in natural situations. Findings of visual ethnographic research can be presented with images and media including but not limited to words.

Marcus Banks has classified visual research methods into three categories namely:
• **Making visual representations** (studying society by producing images)
• **Examining pre-existing visual representations** (studying images for information about society)
• **Collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations** (also known as participatory research).

Difference between ethnography and documentation
Visual ethnography is different from documentation in its intent and requires more time. For example, to find out how an artisan works, you may request her to show you how she makes craft products and take a few pictures of it. And then you will have documentation of how a particular craft product is made. But in the process, you may miss nuances that you were not looking for. This could possibly alter the way you look at their craft or community. So documentation is not visual ethnography. Visual ethnography may start with documentation but goes beyond, to examine what role these artifacts play in the life of the artisans. It looks at their (artisans') behavior, rituals, and belief systems. Once you attempt to conduct visual ethnography you will understand that it is indeed different from documentation.

Difference between ethnography and contextual inquiry
Visual ethnography may sometimes be conflated with contextual inquiry but they are different in terms of their goals. Contextual inquiry aims at uncovering specifics. The main concern for contextual enquiry is to gather data that will help designers in arriving at design solutions for a specific product or service. Visual ethnography is concerned with understanding people and activities in their cultural context rather than arriving at a design solution.

For example, while studying patterns of cell phone usage in elderly- a contextual enquiry would focus on how and for what the elderly use cell phones. Ease of operation, difficulties of understanding or using the phone features,

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the most popular phone features etc. While visual ethnography is more open-ended. So for the same topic of study, a visual ethnographer may want to spend a whole day possibly longer observing the elderly in their context (or environment: whether at their house or park where they go for walks), not focusing on any particular aspect, but gathering as much data (visual/textual) about how elderly spend time, their habits, and their point of view and in that process uncover several insights about life of the elderly that go beyond cell phone usage alone. A visual ethnographer would be interested in understanding how the cell phone becomes a part of the life of the elderly.

Here is an example of visual ethnography: A researcher studying non-agrarian livelihood sources amongst tribal hamlets in the Sahyadri Mountains, Western Ghats, Maharashtra is seen here participating in festivities prior to a community wedding in the village. This gives the researcher a great opportunity to break the ice with the women of the hamlet in their natural setting.

Unda Making:

All the women in the picture are rolling balls of rice flour and turmeric powder called 'Unda' to be distributed to those who will visit the brides' homes to offer gifts and blessings.
Picture courtesy: *Ms. Lubhyathi Rangarajan*

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Methods in Ethnography

The goal of ethnography is not to make truth claims. It is a means to understand people or activities in a context. Research findings differ depending on the researcher, their goals and the manner in which they conduct research. As an ethnographer you will gather data using several methods such as observation, writing field notes, interviews, photo-elicitation, accessing memories, oral histories, gathering genealogies, collaborative photography, looking at the artifacts that participants make etc. Ethnography involves developing trust, rapport and establishing relationships with participants and other stakeholders of your project. While interacting with participants, it is useful to play down personal issues if any and to behave in a manner that does not offend the participants.

Types of Research

Observation

Interviews

Field-Notes

Frameworks

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Types of Research

1. Overt Research:
In overt research, researchers inform their participants about goals and purposes of the investigation. Often a formal consent is sought before starting to gather any information from the participants. For example, if you are trying to understand certain behaviours of children and wish to spend time with them to conduct research, a written consent from their parents/teachers would be required. While seeking consent you could talk to participants individually or in a group, informing them about the purpose of your study, the questions you are seeking to answer etc. You could also discuss methods and tools of data collection. It would be useful to explain how information that is collected would be put to use in the future. Once your study is completed and you arrive at findings, it is a good practice to share them with your participants, as they may be curious about their portrayal in your report, movie or photo-essay depending on methods of representation you chose to share your ethnographic findings.

2. Covert Research:
Research conducted without the participant's knowledge is called covert research. There may be several reasons to conduct covert research such as studying deviant behaviours and activities where access to conduct overt research may not be possible. For example, in a study that involved understanding why people poach endangered animals, covert research methods were employed where the researcher posed to be a buyer of animal skins.

In this photograph, the researcher posed as an Ittar buyer in order to get the shopkeeper to speak about the process of perfume making.

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3. Ethics:
While conducting research- whether overt or covert certain ethics come into play. In all instances, you have to be sensitive to the privacy of concerned participants. As a designer, you must be careful such that the visual tools used do not cause disclosures or other harm to the participants and field collaborators. The use of photography and videography must be avoided when studying members of society who are stigmatized for one reason or the other. For example, victims of sexual assault, and witnesses in criminal cases where disclosure of the individual's identity may mean harm to his/ her safety. The same is true in the case of the study of poachers mentioned earlier. A high degree of sensitivity is required on the part of the ethnographer. S(he) must make the effort to be inclusive, respect people's sense of self, treat everyone with dignity and be sensitive to factors like caste, gender etc. Care must be taken along the way so that participants are not antagonized in any manner so as to ensure future access to the group for further engagement.

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Observation

Observation is a natural way by which humans learn and is a continuous process. In ethnography, observation is a learned art. It seems so easy that we may think there is nothing more to it but for an ethnographer, observation is a key method to engage with participants and the field area. Through observation, you can describe a person (who), a place (where) or a thing (what). Observation is conducted in a time and space that is convenient to the participants rather than the observer. To be an observer requires you to become a part of the natural setting so that you do not draw attention to yourself. In their book Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method, Collier and Collier have observed that the invisibility of the photographer is usually best accomplished by participant observation. We will learn about it soon. During observation, all your senses that as vision, touch, taste, smell and hearing will be put to use and it always helps initially to keep eyes open and mouth shut. Immersion translates into a state of intense awareness regarding what is happening around you. Observation can be a useful method when local language skills are lacking. Observation further helps when the site and the participants of the study are completely unfamiliar to the observers.

Showing up at the study site with lot of enthusiasm but little preparation can be extremely overwhelming as observation can yield plenty of data within a short span of time. While observing, data streams in through a variety of formats. For example, what was said, what was left unsaid, what was implied, facial expressions, gestures, postures of individuals, actions performed etc. The goals and questions of your study will determine the techniques used while conducting an observational study. It would help to plan out beforehand, whether you will employ participant or non-participant observation.

Participant Observation:
Participant observation is where you aim to understand the world of the community members by putting yourself in their shoes. By participating with the community members, you put them at ease and they will not feel the pressure of scrutiny. As a participant observer, recording anecdotes, and layered descriptions of places, persons, objects and activities will yield rich data. Here, you as a designer become a part of their world by empathizing with their position. Participant observation requires a certain degree of skills in order to be able to participate depending on the context. If you wish to be a participant observer while learning about a group of dancers, you may need dancing skills. If you are trying to understand the craft of an embroidery artist as a participant observer, you may require the knowledge of basic stitches etc. Participant observation helps you understand the nuances of a certain activity that the community members themselves will not be able to talk about as they take it for granted. The strength of participant observation lies in the fact that it does not cause any distortion of the context. However, at times, participant observation may not be an option, in such cases we use non-participant observation.

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By participating with the community members, you put them at ease and they will not feel the pressure of scrutiny.

Non-Participant Observation:
Non-participant observation is also known as being a fly on the wall. It means observing from a distance and being as unobtrusive as possible. This method is especially useful in settings where other methods are not usable; as in case of deviant subcultures, participants are unwilling to talk, unable to verbalize, habits that are unfamiliar or disturbing. For example, if you were observing an operation at a hospital- it would be impossible to participate unless you were a trained doctor yourself. In such cases, non-participant observation would be the least intrusive method. But it is not always about lacking the skills to participate; at times the nature of the activity (clandestine, deviant etc) may not require you to participate, in order to understand it. For example, non-participant observation was employed to study a ritual called Jaagar. It is performed by certain communities in the state of Uttarakhand, India to appease the spirits of their ancestors.

Findings from observation alone cannot help us come to a conclusion. Observation should be followed up with interviews to clarify doubts that you may have had in mind.

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Interviews

Interview is a method by which a researcher gathers information and gains an understanding about the participants by asking questions. Interviews can be unstructured (are not directed by a script, rich but not replicable), structured (are tightly scripted, often like a questionnaire) and semi-structured (guided by a script but interesting issues can be explored in more depth. As a method they can provide a good balance between richness and replicability) and unstructured or conversational. Structured interviews are best used when detailed information is sought on a particular topic or when specific questions or doubts have arisen during observation and you need clarification. This method works well when you want to ask the same set of questions to many people. Semi-structured interviews are useful, when you have an intention on finding out certain things but you want to offer the interviewee some space to add something that you haven't been familiar with or aware of. The unstructured or conversational form of interview is best in the preliminary stage of research when you are trying to get a broader picture of a person, an activity or an event. You always benefit from talking to the same person multiple times, but that opportunity may not always be available. And sometimes after you have the same conversation many times, the participants may start second guessing you and telling you what they think you want to hear. The choice of an interviewing method depends upon factors such as the nature of inquiry, the amount of time the interviewee is able to give, and the opportunity to be able to interview the same person more than once. At times it helps to repeat the same set of questions with several individuals when you are trying to understand a particular phenomenon, activity or an event.

Benefits of interviewing: Interviewing as a method makes you more efficient as a researcher by allowing you to prepare a list of questions or an interview guide in advance. This guide can improve gradually through iterations.

How to conduct an interview?
Typically an interview begins with an introduction of yourself and explaining goals of your study. Be pleasant and dress in an acceptable and appropriate manner for the interview. You can reassure the interviewees about ethical issues and seek their permission to record information. You can present a formal consent form to the participants at the end of the introduction. If you are part of an institution, this step is critical. At times, as a part of seeking the consent you may be required to communicate the research questions in advance to the interviewees.

Begin with a warm-up session that includes easy and non-threatening questions that will put participants at ease. Once everyone feels comfortable, you may present main questions in a logical order. You may ask questions in between but it is best not to interrupt the interviewee mid-response. If the interviewee's responses meander a bit, that is okay give them the time to think or recollect information- do not be in a rush to complete your list of questions. Each individual is different and levels of articulation may vary, therefore you may help participants by prompting but do not put words in their mouth. To conclude introduce a cool-off period towards the end where you include a few easy questions to diffuse tension, that may have built up in course of the conversation. Be sure

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to thank the interviewee to signal the end. Don't forget to get their contact details in case you intend to contact them again or send them pictures, articles etc. Offering to share pictures or recordings from the interview, signals politeness. Ask them if you could interview others in their circle who could add value to your study in any way.

Interviewing guidelines:
- Ask participants to complete a consent form
- Check recording equipment in advance, ensure you have spare batteries etc
- Devise a system for coding names of participants to preserve confidentiality
- Use probes (devices for getting more information) e.g. would you like to add anything?
- Use prompts (devices to help interviewee) e.g. help with remembering a name
- Too much probing and prompting can encourage participants to try to guess the answer
- Be aware of your own biases and privacy of concerned participants.

Things to Avoid When Preparing Interview Questions:
You should avoid long sentences while preparing questions for the interview. Compound sentences cause confusion and can be split into two. Jargon & language that the interviewee may not understand may be avoided Leading questions such as 'Why do you like ...' that make assumptions must be avoided. You ought to be careful of unconscious biases.
For example, gender stereotypes creep in during the interview.

You may find yourself recording and interpreting data at the same time. Having an organized note-taking system would help keep things in order, as far as data and your reflections about it are concerned. Let us begin with understanding the method of writing field notes.

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Interviewing as a method makes you more efficient as a researcher by allowing you to prepare a list of questions or an interview guide in advance.

More information about interviewing can be found at:
www.qualres.org/HomeInte-3595.html

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Field-Notes

Field notes:
Working in the field with methods like observation and interviews will produce a lot of notes- these are called field notes. H. Russell Bernard observes that there are four kinds of field notes: jottings, diaries, logs and field notes proper.

Jottings include quick notes that can act like a good memory aid later. For example, noting down few words regarding what transpired during observation sessions or interviews.

Diaries as the name suggests are more personal. It includes your reflections or even your feelings or reactions to certain events that have taken place in the field. In a field setting, you may not be able to share your own struggles and issues with your participants. These feelings may be channelled into your diary.

Logs are an inventory of people you met (their designation, contact details etc), places you visited, how resources such as time and money were spent as well as to-do lists and lists of things that were accomplished.

Field notes proper is also known as 'writing up'. Bernard further divides field notes into methodological notes (notes on what methods worked for you while gathering data in the field as well as which ones did not, and why), descriptive notes (detailed descriptive accounts that are a result of observation in natural settings as well as interviews) and analytic notes (your inference and understanding of a particular community and their activities).

Apart from written descriptions, notes can include photographs, sketches, records and documents from government agencies and other materials which can trigger the memories of context later on, during the stage of data analysis. You could use traditional tools like a pen and book or even cell phone based applications like Evernote where you can take a picture, a video and annotate it with text and it is saved to cloud and can be accessed from anywhere.

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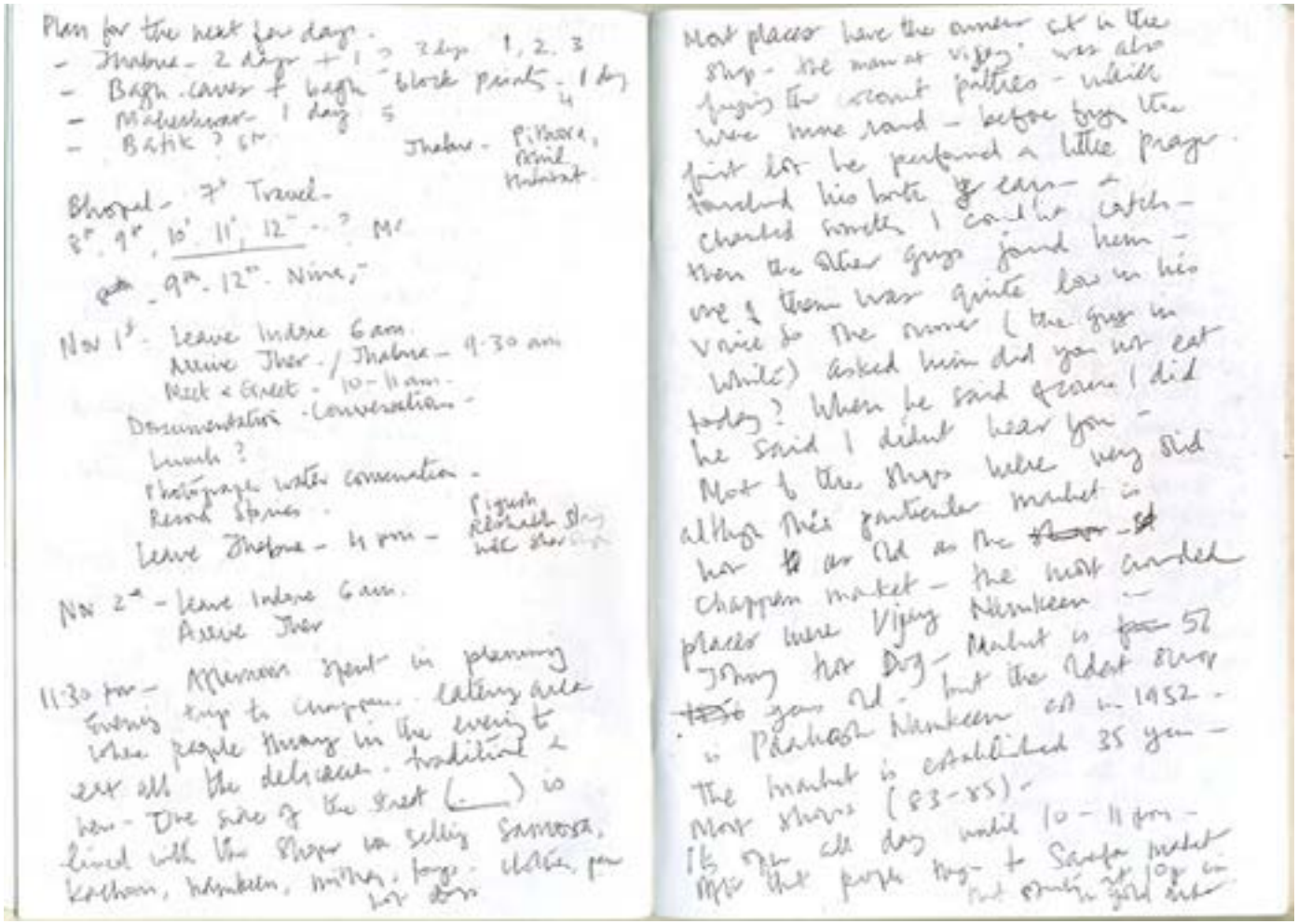

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Frameworks

Frameworks:
There are several frameworks, of which we are sharing two:

The Goetz and Le Compte (1984) Framework:
- Who is present?
- What is their role?
- What is happening?
- When does the activity occur?
- Where is it happening?
- Why is it happening?
- How is the activity organized?

The Robinson (1993) Framework:
- Space: What is the physical space like?
- Actors: Who is involved?
- Activities: What are they doing?
- Objects: What objects are present?
- Acts: What are individuals doing?
- Events: What kind of event is it?
- Goals: What do they accomplish?
- Feelings: What is the mood of the group and of individuals?

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The Process

The Process: Frame a question
Examine existing literature
Choose an appropriate method
Survey the field (reconnaissance visit and gaining acceptance)
Data collection
Data analysis
Representation

1. The Research Question:
In order to begin, you simply have to articulate which group of people and what aspect of their life interests you and why it is important to study it. That becomes your question or assumption. Contrary to the notion that ethnography is conducted only to study 'remote' and 'obscure' cultures, it can be employed to study a known community, activity etc. Existing literature may provide cues towards the framing of questions or assumptions.

2. Examine Existing Literature:
It is useful to study existing literature. It helps you uncover the gaps that exist in studies about the topic of your interest. It also prevents the repetition of an existing study. Examining existing literature will help you understand the kind of frameworks that were used by other researchers and these can be adapted into your own research work with modification, if necessary.

3. Which Method is Most Appropriate?
You may choose a method based on the nature of research problem, your own comfort level, skills and professional expertise, type of information required, budget and time available.

You can choose one or a combination of methods from several such as shadowing, observation, interviewing, gathering genealogies, accessing memories, looking at artifacts and content created by participants, photo elicitation etc. Visual techniques like sketching, photography, video, visual diaries, collaborative map-making can be used to enhance your understanding, as ways to elicit information or record your observations etc. Even after you have decided on the method- say photography, you have to still consider how you will use it in the field. A reconnaissance visit to the field site may help in assessing whether the choice of your methods is suitable.

4. Surveying the Field:
A reconnaissance visit will help you understand what to expect when you move to the site full-time for fieldwork. You can use this visit to get your field logistics in place. For example, you may want to meet and build a rapport with certain gatekeepers who control access to the community/ group of people you have decided to study. You

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may arrange for accommodation for the duration of study and scout for potential participants, collaborators, availability of communication technologies (such as cell-phone recharge, battery charging facilities), health services (health clinic, medical store) etc. This visit will also be useful to determine whether the visual ethnographic method you have chosen for your study is appropriate. For example, you may encounter a situation where photography is considered a taboo and alternate methods will have to be found. It is essential, therefore to understand the context of the research/ study before determining what methods can be used to proceed.

5. How to Gain Acceptance in the Community?
There is no fixed method of breaking the ice and gaining acceptance within the community. This is highly contextual. In the sample projects we discuss along with this course, one designer found it useful to assume the role of a customer while studying the Ittar making community in Chandni-Chowk, Delhi. The community members ran shops and were busy through the day and the shopkeeper-potential customer model was sufficient to break the ice. Later, when there was sufficient acceptance, the designer broached the topic of the study. Another approach would be to offer assistance to someone being studied. While researching a women's collective engaged in animal husbandry-based livelihood of Ghee (clarified butter) making, a designer offered to design a brochure for them and that acted as an instant ice-breaker. Slowly, the women engaged in a discussion on issues faced in their day to day life that went beyond the ghee-making business. Depending on the context of your study- your research question, the place or community or craft you are studying, you can identify an appropriate ice-breaker.

6. Whether and How to involve Participants?
After gaining acceptance in the community and having immersed yourself in the natural setting of the subject, you may gather a wealth of data. However at best this would be your interpretation of what was happening. By involving an informant, the process of conducting ethnography will become more collaborative. The ethnographic data gathered will be richer as it will have the points of view of both you as a researcher as well as your informant- the researched. This will help in validating your findings. Involving participants and engaging in a collaborative ethnographic practice will help put the power back into the subjects/ community being studied. This is one of the several precautions you could take so as to prevent ethnographic practice from being exploitative.

Often times someone with social standing and who enjoys a lot of respect in a particular group could be a good informant. But one should not stop at that, it is a good idea to get data from 'extreme deviants' of the context so that we get a complete and a wholesome understanding of that particular context. Any setting that involves humans has a degree of power dynamics involved as well. It will serve you as designer/ researcher to get both the dominant-normative as well as suppressed-deviant perspectives, while conducting visual ethnography.

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The designer makes an attempt to understand the Warli community by working collaboratively with the traditional artist. A new artefact is born through this negotiation and exchange of ideas. Collaborative making is a good way to learn about communities, especially those engaged in arts and crafts.

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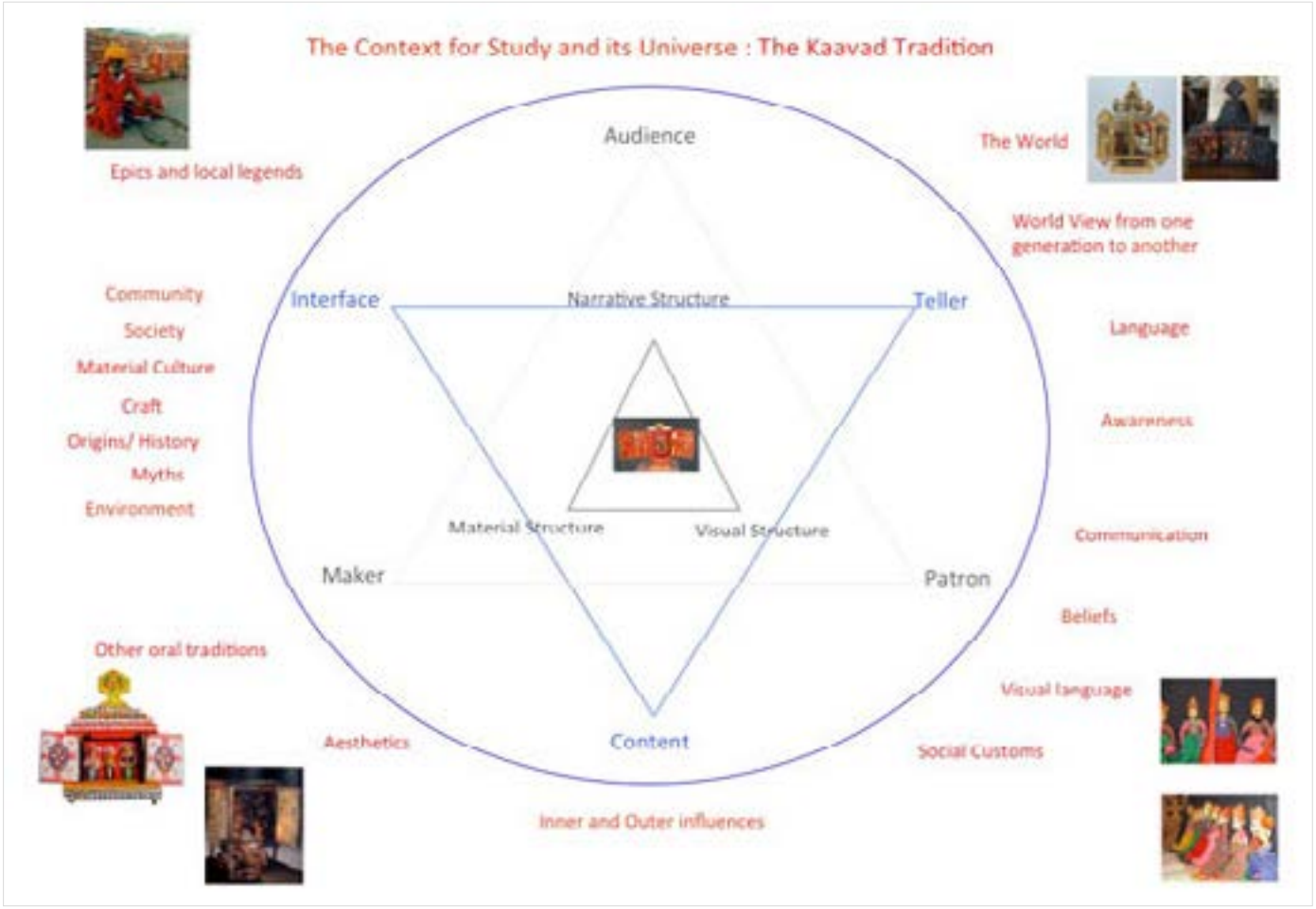

Prof. Nina Sabnani's process of understanding the significance of Kaavad tradition of storytelling crystalised into a study model.

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Using Visual Methods

Visual Methods of Data Collection:

1. Photography:
Photographs show what and how the researcher is seeing. Dona Schwartz notes that photographs are used to record data or generate data (as in photo elicitation). No photograph is inherently an 'ethnographic' material. The meanings of photographs are arbitrary and subjective. They depend upon who is looking at it and how do they read it. A camera can be used to maintain an inventory of all the places visited, people interviewed, their environments, records of space utilization whether inside a house or even a village etc. For example, if you give the camera to your participants and ask them to record a day in their life, then the whole process becomes collaborative and you gain a better understanding of how the participants situate themselves in their surroundings.

Photographs (shot by you or even the participants themselves) can be used during interviews to elicit responses. This is known as photo-elicitation. Photographs prompt memory and people find them useful while telling stories. Sometimes participants may show you pictures of people or things which don't exist anymore but are significant memories. For example, pictures of ancestors or children who passed away at a young age etc. You must be sensitive while both taking pictures as well as using them during interviews. Read more about the use of photography as a method to gather as well as analyze data in the following books: Doing Visual Ethnography by Sarah Pink, Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method by John Collier, Principles of Visual Anthropology edited by Paul Hockings.

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Visual Ethnography for Designers

Understand the design context

by
Prof. Nina Sabnani
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-ethnography-designers/using-visual-methods

Niharika Manchanda used photographic methods to study the Paranthewali Gali (lane), in Chandani Chowk, Delhi, India.

2. Video:
Use of video as a method of data collection is suitable when sequence of events or conversations or activities that are unfolding in the field is important. Human beings are characterized with selective perception. That is they don't process all the information stimuli that is being thrown at them from all directions, at all times. Video helps us to capture the event or activity in its entirety so that you can re-visit it in the future for interpretations. Certain activities take place between long intervals- for example; the Maha Kumbh Mela that takes place once in every 12 years is best captured on video.

Before you decide to use either photography or video, you may need to gauge how a particular culture responds to visuals and to the prospect of being photographed or filmed. Before taking a picture, it is nice to ask for permission. The line between what is public and private is blurry and you may want to tread cautiously, so that those being photographed don't get offended. In this context how you frame your photograph, where you place your camera says a lot about your point of view as a visual ethnographer. For example, while interviewing a person on film, if you go take a tight close-up (go too close to the person's face) it may seem as if you are invading their personal space, on the other hand a tight close up would be recommended while showing how embroidery artists use extremely intricate stitches in their work. Whether the camera 'looks up' or looks down' to the subject also says a lot about the power structures that exist in society as a whole and between the subject and the researcher in specific.

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3. Sketching:
At times, use of certain methods can alienate you from the group of people you are learning about. For example, while trying to understand a community in a very remote and resource-poor setting, your state of the art camera may signify that you are better off than the participants and this may create power imbalance (See section on further reading to learn more). Similarly, if you are conducting your study amidst audience that is by and large semi-literate, your note-taking tendencies may be viewed with suspicion as those you are learning about may not be able to make sense of them. In such cases, sketching becomes a useful and an 'open' platform. Since visuals can be more or less universally understood, they help put everyone at ease. And letting participants collaborate in sketching is especially useful as sketches often reveal local perceptions that may not be otherwise revealed to a researcher.

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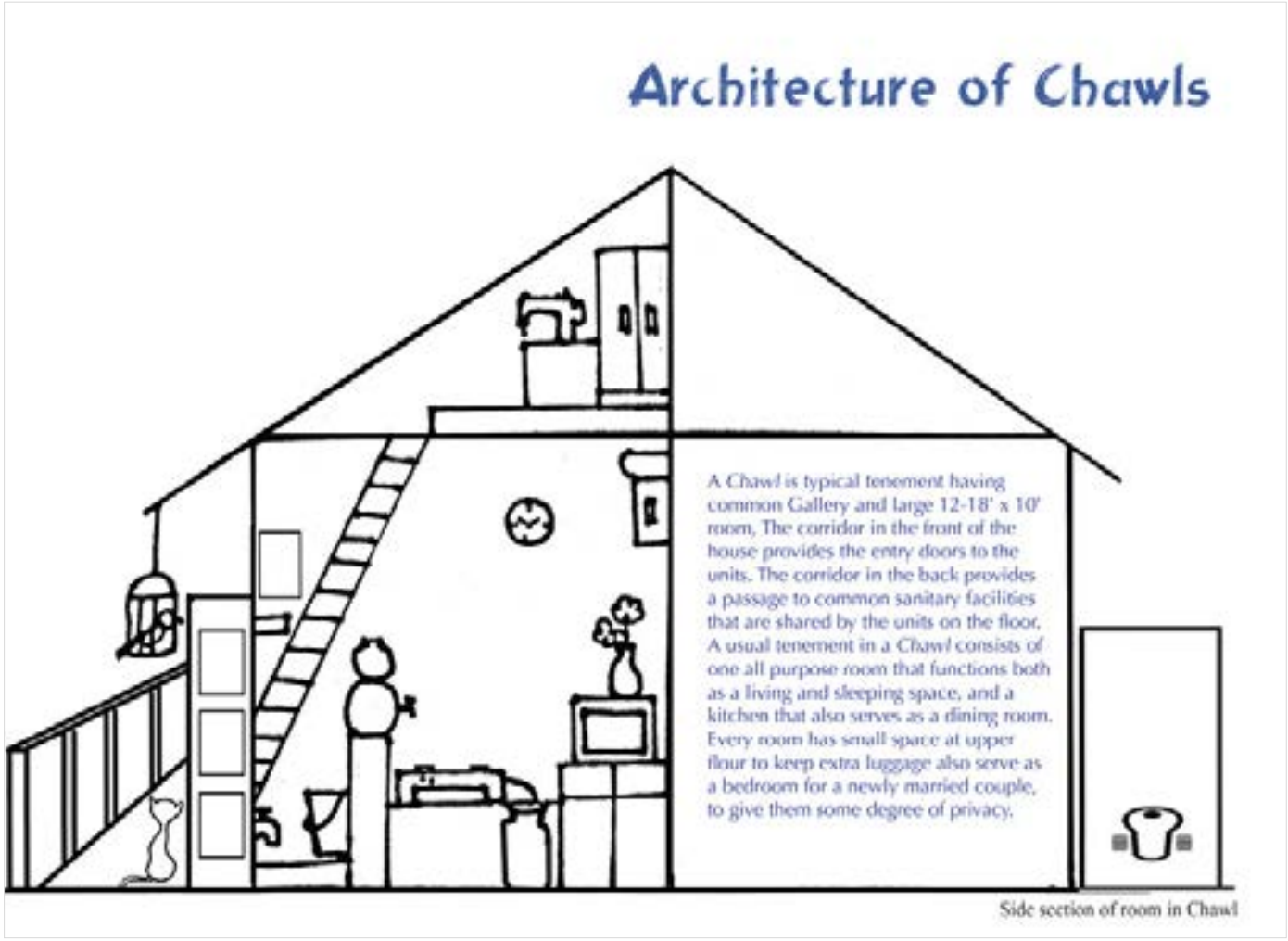

Monica Nanaware employs sketching and photography as methods to study the Chawls in Mumbai. Sketches help understand the structure and distribution of elements, use of space in a typical Mumbai Chawl. Here sketching becomes an act of distilling, removing the excess and focusing attention on a particular aspect.

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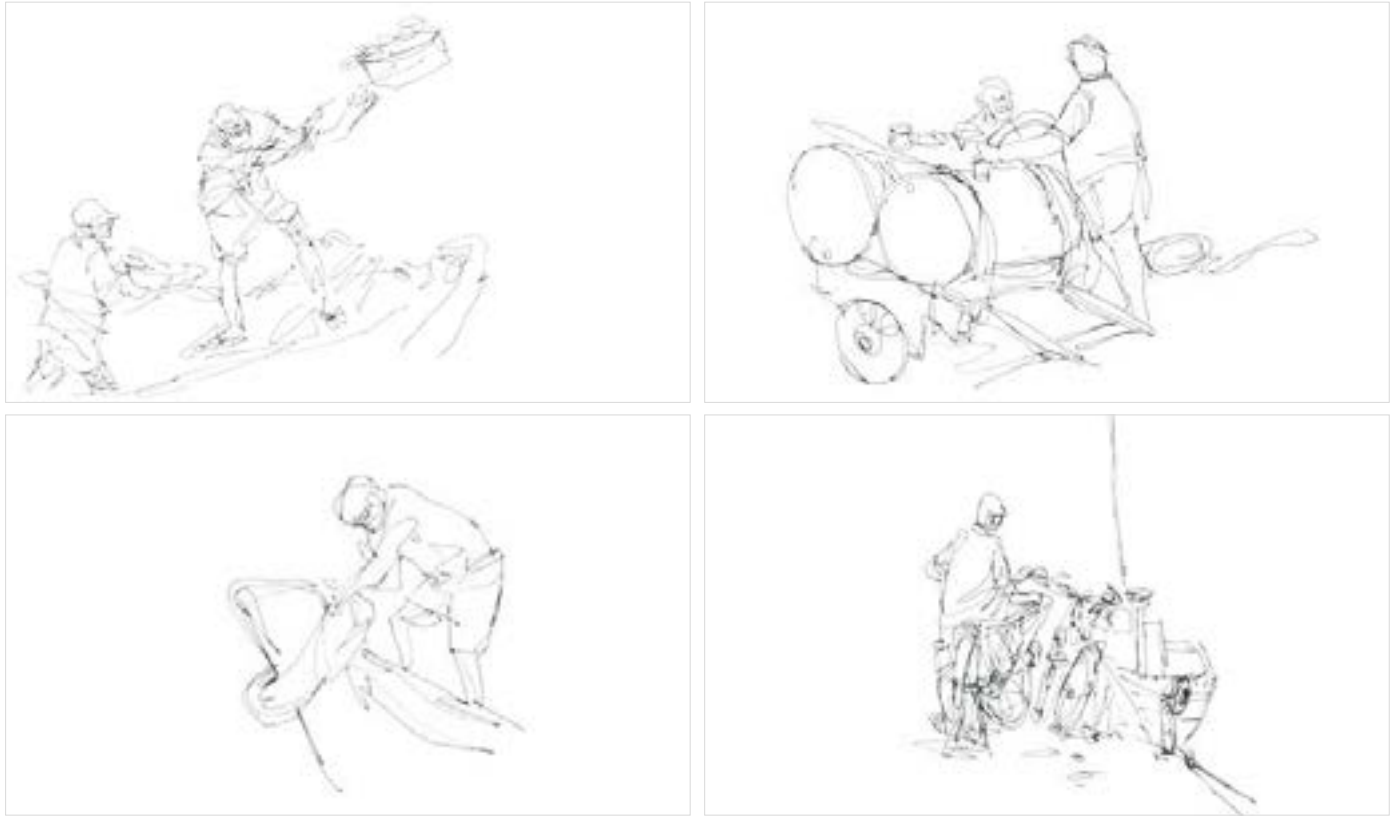

Piyush Verma uses sketches to record daily activities and surroundings at The Sasoon Docks in Mumbai.

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Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/visual-ethnography-designers/data-analysis

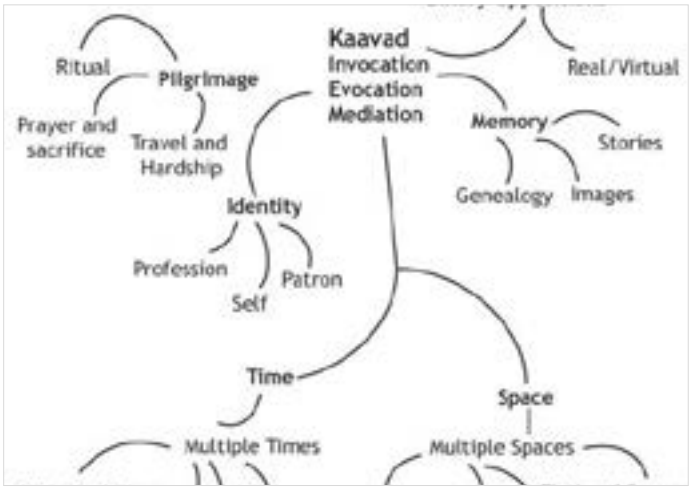
Data Analysis

Data can be broadly classified into qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data are the 'thick descriptions' gathered during study and can be interpreted to tell the 'story' about what was observed. Thick description involves reporting on explanations, inferences and interpretations of how the various data gathered in the field are related with each other. Thick descriptions also include your own reflections as a researcher on what was observed in the field, any biases experienced during the same etc. There are several ways of analyzing qualitative data such as content analysis, structural analysis, semiotic analysis etc. Sarah Pink talks about the role of self-re-flexivity in gathering and analysing ethnographic data.

Quantitative data is collected from interaction & video logs and is presented as values, tables, charts, and graphs and treated statistically.

In order to conduct an interpretive data analysis, look for key events that drive the group's activity. Identify patterns of behavior to understand the group better. You may want to test data sources against each other to ensure that the information you collected is authentic. This is known as triangulation. You can aim at producing 'rich' or 'thick descriptions' and reporting your findings as honestly as possible, while being sensitive to the com-munity you studied. Including quotes, pictures, and anecdotes can make the findings come alive, instead of them being dry data. You can use software tools if the quantity of data gets too overwhelming to handle. Coloured markers, post-it notes and a white board can go a long way too.

Storytelling using Kaavad



One can organise the flow of thoughts in the form of a mind map seen above.

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It is not just notes and recorded conversations that can be analyzed. Images whether created by the researcher or the participants of the study can be analysed using reflexivity. See Sarah Pink's book Doing Visual Ethnography for more on this. A photograph is not merely a proof that something happened. It can be interpreted in several ways depending on who is looking at it and what meaning is being invested into it.

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A look at items in the showcase reveals a lot about what the community member values. The analysis on an image cannot take place unless meaning invested both by the community member as well as researchers are looked into.

Picture Courtesy: P. Karthikeyan.

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Representation

Representation of Visual Ethnographic Data:

Visual methods are used not only to gather data but are an instrument to arrive at and communicate the findings too. That is, the analysis could be represented using visual methods such as photo essays, films (animated or live-action), an installation, a book and so on. Especially for designers, as they would use findings from ethnographic methods to inform their design practice. Here are a few examples:

After the final Painting was done Roma started working on extracting the elements from the canvas and forming a new composition as per the story line.

These are the important scenes of the story which had been composite by the artist in this painting.

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Roma followed the same process throughout and came up with interesting compositions for each page of the book, according to the story.

This is one of the examples of the compositions.

The exchange between designer + researcher Roma Singh with members of Warli community to find out more about their art culminated in an illustrated book.

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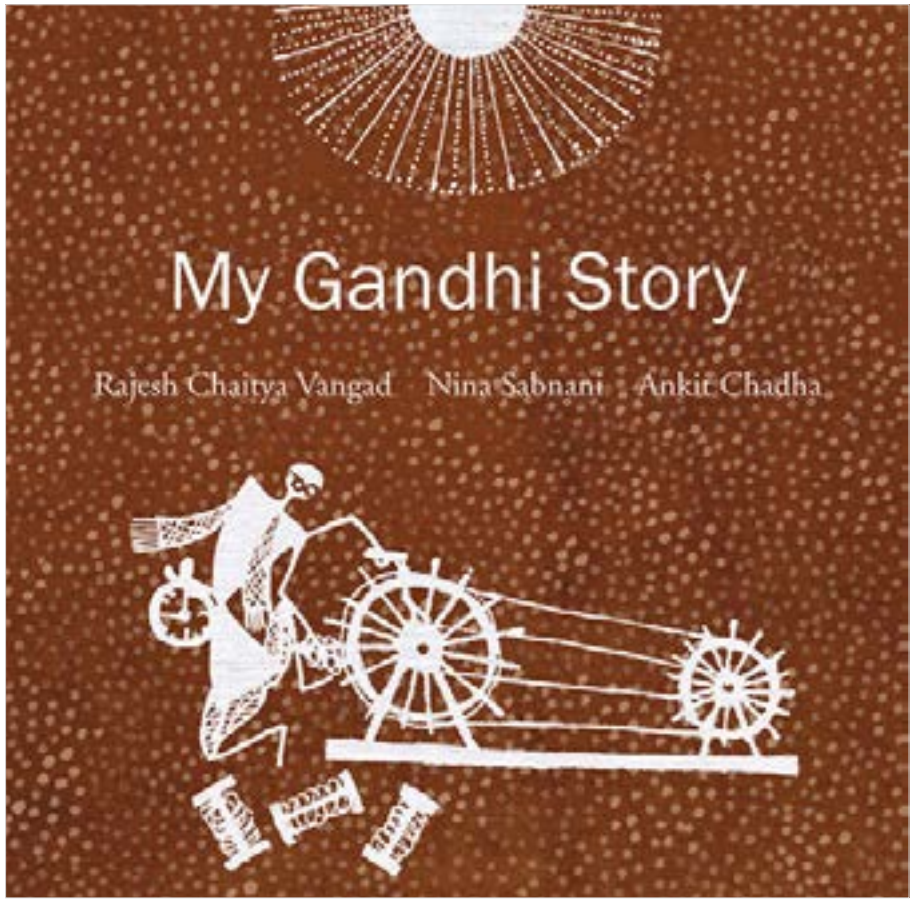
Everyone has their own story of Gandhi — and in this book, which came out of a set of four large paintings, an artist of the Warli tradition, an animation filmmaker and a storyteller come together in a unique collaboration to create a very visual Gandhi story. While the artist was inspired to paint Gandhi's life simply because "he was like us", the curating of the visuals was inspired by the delightful details in the paintings, picked and highlighted with care. There are the recurring motifs of buying a ticket and going on a journey by ship and by train, of physical work, the capturing of a moment rather than movement. Like the three creators behind the book, there are three voices that tell the story — of Rajesh the narrator, the questioning child, and Gandhiji or Bapu himself, all coming together to introduce young children to the great man called Mahatma Gandhi.



MY GANDHI STORY by Nina Sabnani, Ankit Chadha and pictures by Rajesh Chaitya Vangad, published by Tulika Books. Learn more:
http://www.tulikabooks.com/our-books/picture-books/general-picture-books/my-gandhi-story

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Similarly, in Tanko Bole Che, community members tell their stories through the medium of embroidery- an art and craft that is central to their culture in Kachchh, Gujarat.

About Baat Wahi Hai

Animated film Baat Wahi Hai by Nina Sabnani

Thank you many times by Nina Sabnani

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Sample Reports

- **Chawls in Mumbai** ..... (8.72 MB)
- **Fragrance Lane** ..... (8.67 MB)
- **Phulkari** ..... (11.23 MB)
- **Paranthewali Gali (Lane)** ..... (8.36 MB)
- **Visual Narrative on Warli Painting** ..... (6.2 MB)
- **The Tigerland** ..... (16.2 MB)
- **Shepherds (Dhangar) of Aarewadi** ..... (20.1 MB)
- **Beaten Brass Ghaagar** ..... (2.61 MB)
- **Chikan - Kari** ..... (4.19 MB)
- **Clothing - Imphal, Manipur** ..... (8.96 MB)
- **Dastarkhwan** ..... (2.54 MB)
- **Ema Keithel - mother's market** ..... (3.89 MB)
- **Murtikar - Idol Makers of Pen** ..... (2.32 MB)
- **Poshak** ..... (5.55 MB)
- **Tai Phake Tribe in Namphake Village - Assam** ..... (16.26 MB)
- **Thang Ta - The Marshal Art of Manipur** ..... (1.33 MB)

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- **Visual Ethnography - Gadiya Lohar** ..... (2.63 MB)
- **Ziro - Then and Now** ..... (12.03 MB)

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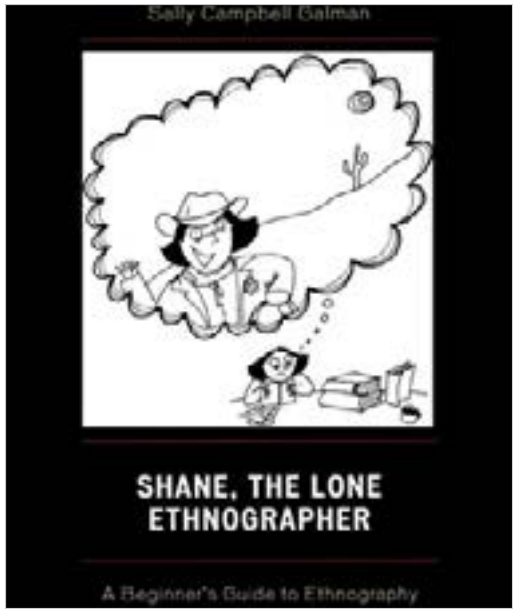
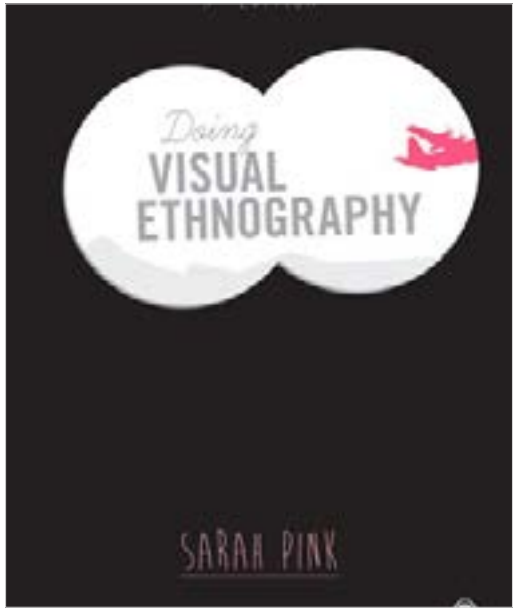
Further Reading



- Shane, the Lone Ethnographer: A Beginner's Guide to Ethnography



- Doing Visual Ethnography by Dr Sarah Pink

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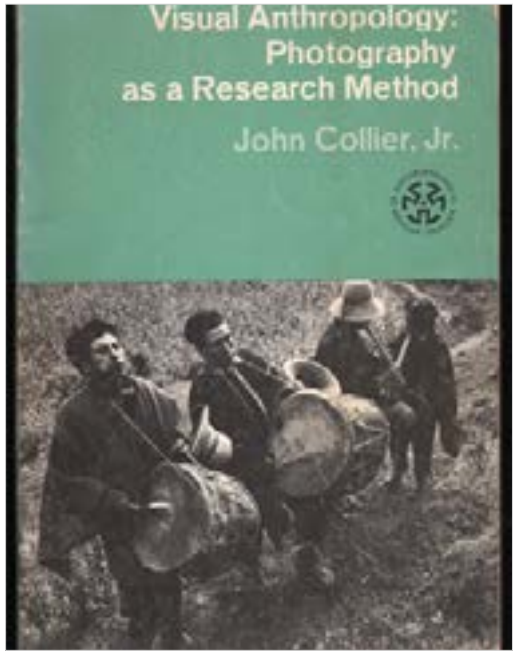
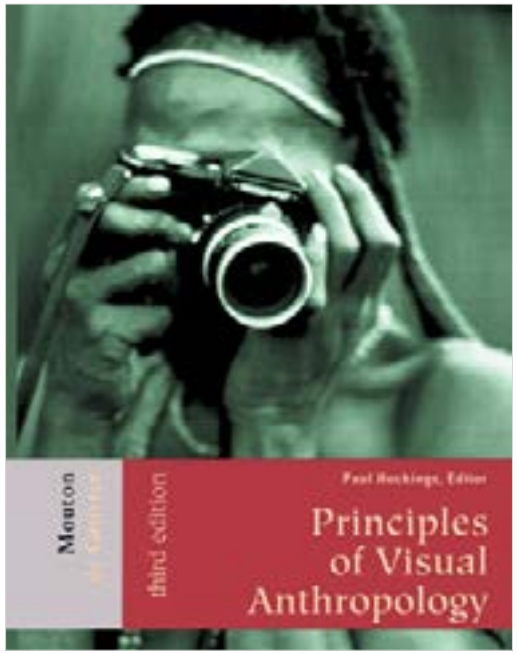


• Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method by John Collier



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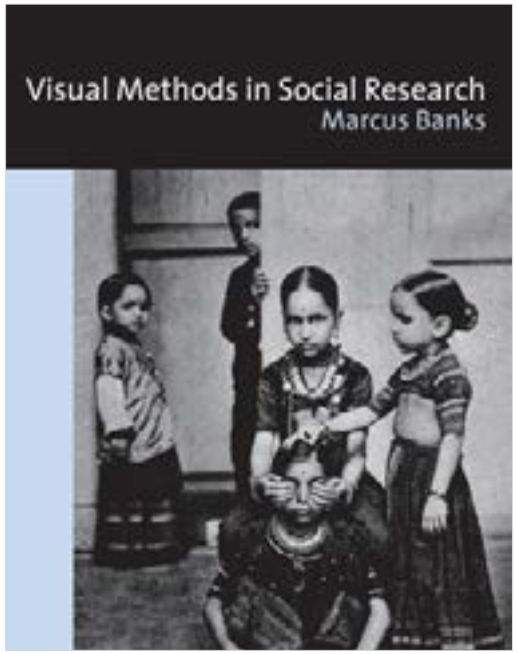
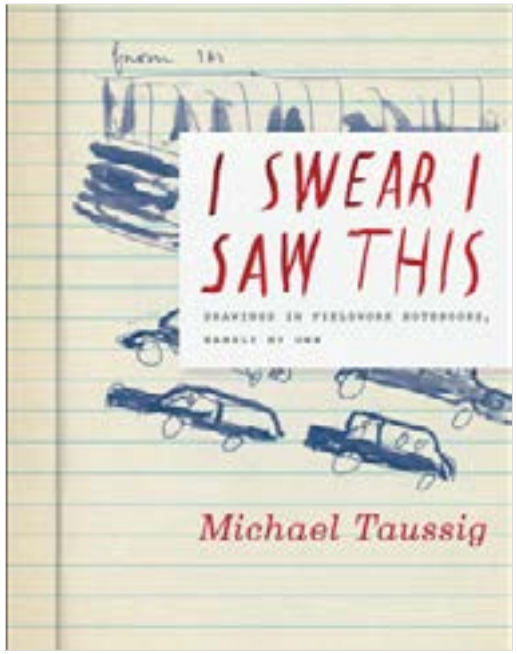


• Visual methods in social research by Marcus Banks



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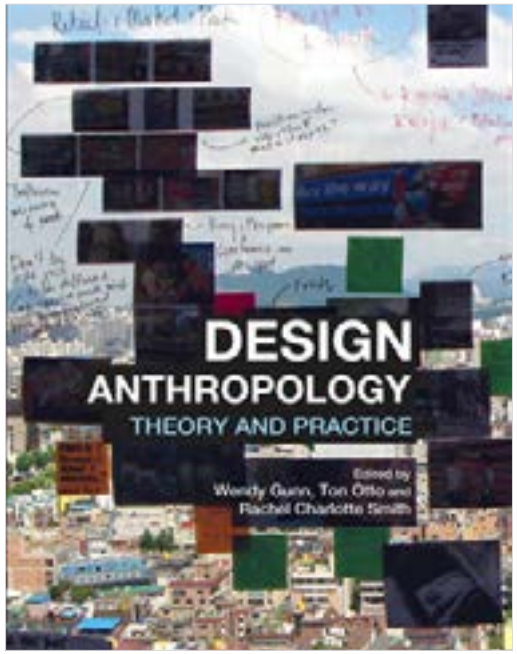

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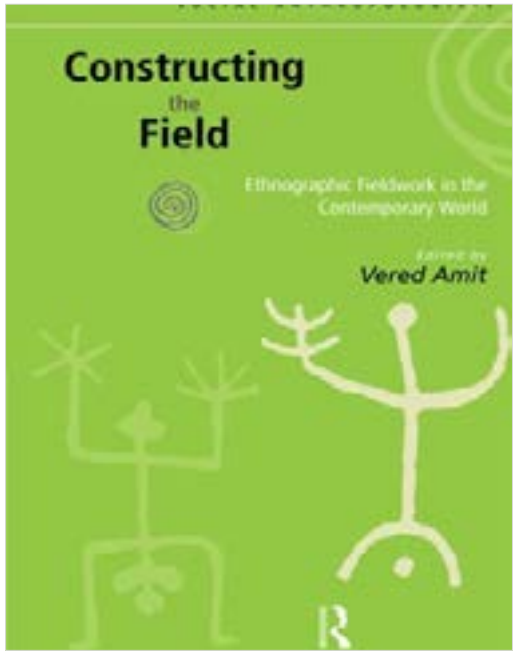

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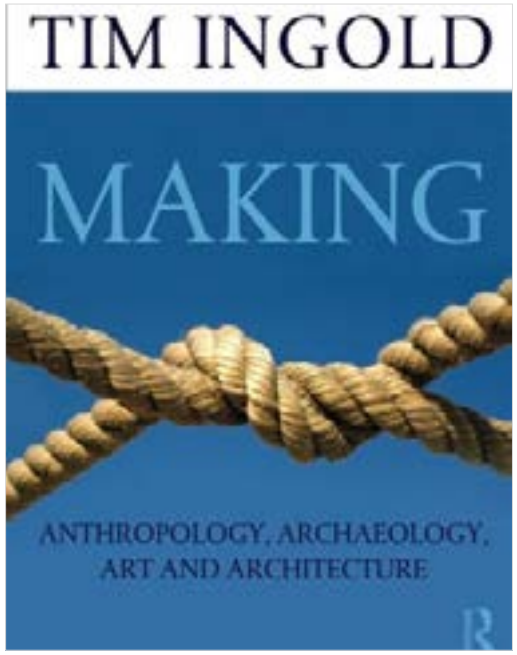

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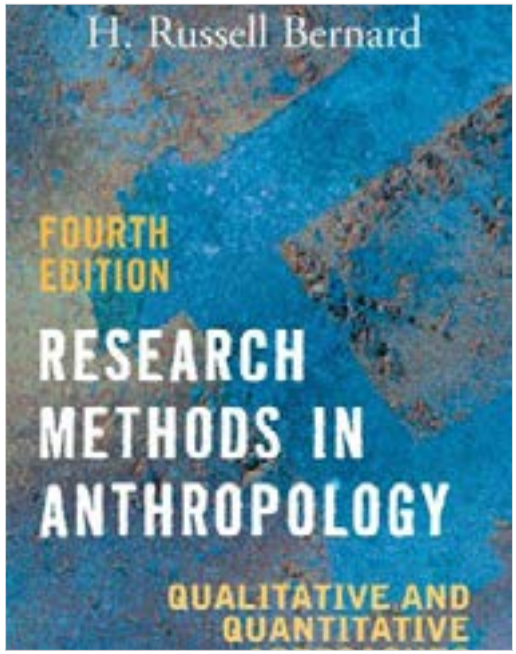

• http://www.amazon.com/Research-Methods-Anthropology-Qualitative-Quantitative/dp/0759108684

Learn more:

• Kaavad: A portable Shrine
https://www.dsource.in/resource/kaavad

• Ajrakh Printing: Traditional craft of block printing and dyeing of Kachchh
https://www.dsource.in/resource/ajrakh-block-printing-kutch-gujarat

• Zardozi: Stitches of Lucknow
https://www.dsource.in/resource/zardozi

• Making visual representations (studying society by producing images) Learn more at https://www.dsource.in/case-study/intellectual-observer that examines how visual culture of a region transforms over a period of time. The researcher gathers information by creating photographs of artifacts found in public spaces (in this case temple gates and traffic police booths)

• Examining pre-existing visual representations
(studying images for information about society) Learn more at
https://www.dsource.in/resource/kaavad.

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Here a film maker interested in traditional form of storytelling looks at Kaavad a portable, painted, wooden shrine, from Marwar region in Rajasthan.

• Collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations (also known as participatory research). This blog is a great example of participatory research using visual methods
http://madeinkachchh.wordpress.com/2013/10/11/a-blockprint-universe-full-of-silhouette-buffaloes/

• David and Judith MacDougall's film Photo Wallahs, on photographic practices in an Indian hill town, is a great example in this category. Read more about it here
http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1525/var.1992.8.2.96/abstract
http://www.electrostani.com/2012/01/notes-on-photo-wallahs-1992.html

• www.education-portal.com/academy/lesson/what-is-ethnography-studying-cultural-phenomena.html#lesson
• http://vimeo.com/47027495 On 'writing up'

• www.amazon.com/gp/product/1412970113/ref=pd_lpo_sbs_dp_ss_1/177-8387064-9407433?pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX-0DER&pf_rd_s=lpo-top-stripe-1&pf_rd_r=16SW2EJ4C1CWP 9Z35732&pf_rd_t=201&pf_rd_p=1535523702&pf_rd_i=0803937938

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• www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/WQR/wolcott.pdf

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Video

Tanko Bole Chhe

About Baat Wahi Hai

Film Baat Wahi Hai

Thank You Many Times

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Professor Nina Sabnani, Faculty at IDC, IIT Bombay.

You can get in touch with her at ninamsabnani[at]iitb.ac.in

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