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Social Science Research in Motion

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Video Methods

Social Science Research in Motion

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Video Methods

This interdisciplinary collection provides a set of innovative and inventive approaches to the use of video as a research method. Building on the development of visual methods across the social sciences, it highlights a range of possibilities for making and working with video data. The collection showcases different video methods, including video diaries, video go-alongs, time-lapse video, mobile devices, multi-angle video recording, video ethnography, and ethnographic documentary. Each method is presented through a case study, showing how it can be used in practice. The authors offer pragmatic advice and discuss practical issues, including equipment, techniques and skills, analysis, and presentation. They also show how video methods can be used in a range of different contexts—at train stations, on bicycles, in schools, outdoors, and in museums—to investigate worlds that are visible, audible, tangible, and in motion. In doing so, they illuminate the theoretical possibilities that video methods offer for researching the body, identity, everyday life, affect, time, and space.

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	vii
Introduction: Putting Things in Motion	1
CHARLOTTE BATES	
1 Intimate Encounters: Making Video Diaries about Embodied Everyday Life	10
CHARLOTTE BATES	
2 Atmospheres of Arrival/Departure and Multi-Angle Video Recording: Reflections from St Pancras and Gare du Nord	27
PAUL SIMPSON	
3 The Mobile Life of Screens: Digital Imaging on School Journeys in Helsinki	49
KIM KULLMAN	
4 Witnessing Craft: Employing Video Ethnography to Attend to the More-Than-Human Craft Practices of Taxidermy	71
MERLE PATCHETT	
5 Close Encounters: Using Mobile Video Ethnography to Understand Human-Animal Relations	95
KATRINA M. BROWN AND ESTHER BANKS	
6 Jumps, Stutters, Blurs and Other Failed Images: Using Time-Lapse Video in Cycling Research	121
KATRINA JUNGNICHEL	
7 Creative Video Ethnographies: Video Methodologies of Urban Exploration	142
BRADLEY L. GARRETT AND HARRIET HAWKINS	

vi *Contents*

8	Working with Sound in Video: Producing an Experimental Documentary about School Spaces	165
	MICHAEL GALLAGHER	
9	"Everything Is Going On at the Same Time": The Place of Video in Social Research Installations	187
	BRITT HATZIUS AND NINA WAKEFORD	
10	Life Off Grid: Considerations for a Multi-Sited, Public Ethnographic Film	209
	JONATHAN TAGGART AND PHILLIP VANNINI	
	Afterword: Video Methods beyond Representation: Experimenting with Multimodal, Sensuous, Affective Intensities in the 21st Century	230
	PHILLIP VANNINI	
	<i>Contributors</i>	241
	<i>Index</i>	245

Figures

1.1	"I don't really check in the middle of the night when I hypo, because why else would I wake up in the middle of the night, other than because my sugar level has dropped. Let's find out." (Imogen, Video Diary)	18
1.2	"There's something about the sound of a coffee maker, it just makes you feel like your day is off to a really good start!" (Meghan, Video Diary)	20
1.3	"I think stairs are really beautiful. I always thought stairs were pretty great, ever since I was a little kid." (Anwen, Video Diary)	22
2.1	Man with suitcase standing looking at departures sign. The man dressed in black holding the wheeled suitcase was used to synchronise the top two video streams. From there, a second event visible in three of the video streams was used to synchronise all four video streams.	36
2.2	Orientation in arriving in St Pancras (detail from St Pancras multi-angle filming). Passengers arrive to the right of the pillar on the far right of the image/beneath the sign that is partially visible here. To the top left of the image the staircase that partially obscures passengers' views can be seen.	40
2.3	'Acces Interdit'. The top left image shows the platform sign saying 'Acces Interdit' (Access Forbidden). The bottom right image shows a growing crowd of people who have stopped to see what is going on and/or waiting to access the platform. The top right image shows a young couple affectionately playing and occasionally embracing.	42

7 Creative Video Ethnographies

Video Methodologies of Urban Exploration

Bradley L. Garrett and Harriet Hawkins

Five of us are standing under the Forth Rail Bridge. We're in North Queensferry, a quiet little town near Edinburgh, looking up from the parking lot at the northern tower foundation holding the gorgeous steel monstrosity aloft. Our mission tonight is to climb the bridge, crossing it from north to south, over the three towers and the Firth of Forth. The weather doesn't look promising, but we've driven over 400 miles from London to get here and no one wants to turn around.

Helen, James, Marc, Moses and I are collecting footage for *Crack the Surface III*, the final instalment of a collaborative video triptych we started in 2010. We're shooting on Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) cameras and using two lenses, a 35 mm lens and a 24 mm. Each lens gives us a different frame, different depth-of-field and a different feel. Additionally, we are wearing head- and chest-mounted cameras for Point of View (POV) shots. Keeping in mind that video is as much about sound as visuals, we also have high quality audio recorders in our bags and are strapped up with lapel microphones threaded through our jackets. We are also wearing headphones to monitor the audio. I feel like a cyborg.

Moses turns to us and says, "Okay, everyone ready?" I don't feel ready at all, I feel overburdened with equipment and scared something is going to go wrong after driving all this way, be it rain, the police turning up or worse.

Helen and I sneak in first. I film her hopping the fence. Then I throw the camera over and she films me negotiating it. Once inside, we hide. James films the second group as they sneak in. Then, all together, we run across the construction yard and jam ourselves into the hollow leg of a tower support. Inside, James and I get held up trying to adjust the cameras for the new light situation. I have the camera strapped around my neck as I begin to climb the ladders inside the leg support and the strap is choking me. I'm really hot. As I'm yelling at people to let me climb past them so I can film them climbing up, a pigeon slams into me and flaps feverishly, ripping out my headphones. I climb down to retrieve them and realise the video camera is still recording. That will all be wasted footage. When I plug the headphones back in, the batteries have died on the audio recorder and I can no longer hear anyone climbing. I'm sweating, exhausted and I feel like I want to cry.



Figure 7.1 Garrett climbing the Forth Rail Bridge. Image: Marc Explo.

By the time we reach the top of the ladders, 100 meters above the spraying surface of the water and pop a hatch on top of the tower, I've given up trying to record anything. I have only a moment to take in the view because James, who is clearly a more diligent cameraman, asks me to go back in the hatch and come out again so he can film it. Still sticky with sweat, I climb back in the hatch and close it for a re-enactment.

We take a bit of time to resituate ourselves, changing batteries, tucking wires back in, checking sound. Cooled down, I adjust the camera settings for the night sky and start recording conversations again. Then the climb begins.

It's treacherous. We end up scooting down the steel beams of the bridge like slugs. I try to get people to talk about what they're feeling and it doesn't work—we're simply too overwhelmed by the experience to articulate it. Resting on the top of the second tower, one-third of the way across, I turn off the camera, keeping the voice recorder running, and try to prompt a discussion that goes beyond description by asking everyone if they think they are creating chaos. Moses dryly responds, "Dude, we're not on camera anymore . . ." and looks away, deflating my attempt to record more than embodied, exerted grunting.

Two-thirds of the way across the bridge, just past the last tower, it starts to rain. I realise I'm losing my grip, trying to film with one hand and climb with the other. James, filming us from the other side of the bridge, suddenly yells, "If we don't start crawling really fast right fucking now we are going to die on this bridge!" The cameras are turned off and stowed. The final shots depict a state of panic as the group runs down the train tracks with the morning light beaming in. We're covered in the famous paint of the Forth Rail Bridge as we drive home, replaying the footage in the car, already nostalgic.

* * *

INTRODUCTION: CREATIVE INTERSECTIONS

Our opening vignette is drawn from the ethnographic filmmaking practice of one of our authorial pairing, Bradley Garrett. Over the course of three years, Brad produced 12 videos whilst working on a research project about urban exploration—a not-uncontroversial practice of sneaking into, and often photographing, urban spaces closed to public access (Bennett 2011; Garrett 2010, 2011a, 2013a, b; Mott and Roberts 2014). During the same period Harriet's research focused on 'creative geographies', experimenting with a range of creative visual art and curatorial practices—exploring their value with respect to researching and presenting key geographical questions around senses of place and the sensing of space (Hawkins 2010, 2013a, 2013b). In this chapter we have two aims. Primarily, we narrate the processes of producing a video ethnography of urban exploration, from Brad's experience in the field (described in the first vignette above) to our collaborative

editing process (described in a second vignette below). Second, we address the conceptual, political and ethical questions thrown up in the course of producing this video ethnography, and we propose the idea of 'creative video ethnographies' as a way of necessarily complicating potentially reductive accounts of these methods.

The place and value of filmmaking as part of ethnographic research, in one sense, needs no introduction. If geographers have tended to focus on cinematic analyses (Aitken and Zonn 1994; Cresswell and Dixon 2002), wherein film is taken as an empirical object, filmmaking has, for over a century, had a place in ethnographic studies, and played an important role in researchers' ongoing querying of the politics and ethics of these practices (Banks 1992; Ruby 2005). Recently, geographers have begun to embrace the possibilities of filmic production, in, for example, fields of participatory geographies (Kindon 2003; Parr 2007), and in relation to embodied, often auto-ethnographic working (Laurier and Philo 2006; Simpson 2011). With the addition of Pink's (2007, 2009) recent work on video making as part of multi-modal, multi-sensuous ethnographies of place and community, video ethnography has been firmly established as a research method. Yet, as we want to explore in this chapter, there are a series of important questions that geographers, as filmmakers, have yet to address in regard to the production of video, especially as part of ethnographic research.

The pivot of our concern is the need to appreciate the creative possibilities and affective force of filmmaking. We channel this into four strands of inquiry. First, there are important (missing) lines of questioning, we think, around how, and for what purposes, geographers are finding increasing value in filmmaking. Second, we want to encourage grounding these interests not just in a discussion of the practicalities of equipment and the development of technique, but also in the philosophy and politics of these practices. Third, we are concerned with the role of creativity during the editing process. Finally, we want to foreground how, as filmmakers, we need to appreciate how our materials go to work on audiences—how the productive force of these creations exceeds the intentions, desires and capacities of the filmmaker. In sum, and as with other creative (sometimes called artful or experimental) methods, valorisation is based in the possibilities these practices offer to more-than-representational modes of enquiry, and an increasing recognition of the need to understand and appreciate the manifold productive forces of creative practices in the world (Dwyer and Davies 2010; Hawkins 2013b; Last 2012). To elaborate on key questions and chapter structure, we want briefly to return to our opening vignette.

Viewing the still frame with which the chapter opened (Figure 7.1), we are reminded of the trite adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. This image, one still frame from amongst thousands collected that night, contains a sense of the informational concentration that can be packed into a frame, revealing a pace and complexity of social backstory and embodied action that outstrips the possibilities of empirical observation (Brown et al. 2008; Büscher

2005). As we explore via Brad's films, one key driver for geographical video-making specifically is the medium's recognised value for moving us beyond the textual and representational (Lorimer 2010; Merchant 2011; Straughan 2011). Video enables the study of a range of 'bodyworks' that rework the record. As such, it can open out of iterations of the non/more-than-representational through the affective, the atmospheric, the material and the relational. Advancing video technologies enable researchers to go to places and see things that are beyond the capacity of the human sensory system.¹ In the process, they draw to the fore configurations of body-space-technology/equipment relations. These relations go to work on the research subject, as long acknowledged by anthropologists and sociologists, but they also produce the researcher-subject. Being a researcher-subject is never a simple question of the deployment of technology. It involves manifold considerations of the technical and the aesthetic, but also a querying of the role of habit, action and contingency. Considering creativity throughout these discussions, is, we argue, to press at the edges of extant literatures, practices and techniques, spurring us on to build new modes of enquiry and to inhabit our technologies creatively. In so doing, these technologies not only enable extensions of capacities and affordances as embodied researcher-subjects, but also allow us, in turn, to stretch and expand the apparent limits of technology itself through creative, skilful praxis. This discussion of equipment and skilling forms the first part of our chapter.

In the second part of this chapter, following Rose (2007), we extend our collective methodological lens in two directions: bringing into focus the process of editing, and enlarging considerations of audiencing. Video is valuable for its production of an ethnographic archive (Pink 2008) that, as Brad writes elsewhere, researchers can "graze" at times and spaces beyond the field experience (Garrett 2011b, 526). Here, however, we assert other values and spaces of ethnographic video making during editing and post-production. Building on the limited geographical literature on editing (Bauch 2010; Laurier 2009; Parr 2007) we conceptualise it as a creative-analytic process, combining the aesthetic and informational in a suite of digital-material processes that are as much about research and analysis as they are oriented toward the production of outputs.

Editing is of course a question of audiencing. Considerations of audiencing require that we foreground the productive force of films on the multiple audiences of the work, from the filmmaker as first field-based viewer, to myriad 'secondary' audiences who encounter the film as it circulates. Moving through the world, video-ethnographic creations go to work in a range of ways. As researchers, we have a political and ethical responsibility to be aware of the effects of our ethnographic films, effects that might be informational, affective, co-creative, aesthetic, symbolic, political or all of these at once (Hawkins 2013a). We emphasise the need to be vigilant regarding the possibilities of our ethnographic productions being mobilised by others, redeployed in ways that can cut across their creative-aesthetic sensibilities, assert scientism and objectivity where none was claimed and change meanings in ways thoroughly incongruent with situated ethnographic intent.

KIT THAT WORKS: CONCEPTUALISING EQUIPMENT

Equipment choices are often a function of the progress of research and emerging social situations, rather than predictable in advance (Laurier et al. 2008). In making an ethnography of urban exploration, quick adaptation was needed to the physicality of the practice, and to the community's socialities, including its ecologies of visibility (Garrett 2010, 2013a, b). Conforming to a style of traditional ethnographic filmmaking, footage was initially shot on a large, shoulder-mounted High-Definition Video (HDV) camera. The shoulder-mounted HDV camera was valued for material, aesthetic and social reasons. Its physical ruggedness and simple manual controls, combined with the ability to attach external microphones, attracts researchers. Furthermore, the technology produces a particular aesthetic sensibility, with small sensors and deep depth-of-field enabling everything in the frame to be easily kept in focus.² This is considered ideal for strenuous, unscripted field shooting where losing the focus means missing a moment (Ruby 2005). Finally, there is a social element. A large camera lends social credibility to the researcher, making them appear more 'professional', which can have important implications for issues of access, especially when dealing with authority figures.

Quickly, however, this equipment was found to be ill-suited to the active nature of urban exploration. Rather than abandoning video as a method, however, a choice was made to work with project participants to address the issue. Collaborative decisions were agreed upon about where and when to shoot, what equipment to shoot with and footage was often pooled for editing.³ Experimenting with shooting films on a lower-quality handheld camcorder allowed for greater mobility and ease of shooting, but the camera did not perform well in low light situations and restricted manual control. Proficiency with still cameras is normative in the urban exploration community, meaning that it was often necessary for researchers to switch cameras in the course of action, and video footage was only collected until a good photo opportunity arose. DSLR cameras, the still cameras explorers often shoot on, have the capacity for interchangeable lenses (and therefore framing), and a large (full-frame) sensor that approximates a 35 mm shallow depth-of-field paired with a fast lens. Though harder to achieve focus 'correctly', a shallow depth-of-field more closely mimics human optics. Midway through the research, a single camera was released that allowed for proficient (indeed professional) production of both still and moving images.⁴ Beyond technical detailing, we would emphasise the situated nature of the evolution of an individual maker's tool kit, and the need both to plan, but also to be willing and able to experiment and respond creatively in the field.

Currently, some of the most experimental and creative methods are being developed by scholars interested in embodied ethnographies (e.g. Pink 2008). In this context, video is cast as a tool of multi-sensory and affective discovery *par excellence*, with kit like POV cameras, waterproof casings and increasingly advanced automated settings enabling experimental developments in

mobile and sensory ethnographies (Spinney 2009; Straughan 2011). In such studies video ethnographies stand as research artefacts with manifold possibilities. These include: enabling an exploration of events that might otherwise be missed in the course of 'action' (important when focused on climbing a bridge, for example); the presentation of a fine-grained exploration of sensory experiences through the production of a multi-sensory 'feeling there'; or a 'doing something' or 'being someone' that might otherwise not be physically possible or accessible to the researcher.

To explore these ideas further, we turn to the *Hobohemia* travelogue triptych, a series of ethnographic videos made by Brad as part of his urban exploration fieldwork.⁵ Through urban camping and ruin exploration, the films raise questions about the interactions between bodies and the forces and materialities of derelict architecture. In the films we 'see' the forces and tensions of explorers' bodies bent on action, as they balance, crawl, wriggle, slither and slide their ways through gaps and spaces. Viewers are reminded of the multi-sensuous possibilities of film beyond the visual and aural, as textures in particular become pictured and sounded (Marks 2002). Frames focused on balanced feet, gripping hands and contorted limbs, render visible the forces of material interaction, physical tensions written in muscles, sinew and across faces.

What is made visible in these shots is the interplay of the five external senses with the internal senses engaged by bodies-in-action. Playing out before our eyes is the thinking-feeling—the in-the-moment decision-making—of bodies, as a ledge is tested for weight-bearing, a rope is swung and reswung to cover distance, the trained-body is honed, its capacities and limitations tested, apprehended and overcome. In their replaying, we can appreciate these shots as a rendering visible of the invisible; both those things which the physiology of the human eye may not normally enable us to bring into focus, and those things—forces and affects for example—that have no visible presence, located in the audio, the inference, the layering and in the imagination of what lay outside the frame.

Different technologies—the shoulder-mounted camera, the DSLR and tripod, the head-mounted POV camera—produce different fields of vision (Daniels 1993). The varying modalities of seeing that inhere within these different "views on the world" (Rose 2007) produce different aesthetic sensibilities that find form in the final films. The headcam, for example—used in both the Forth Rail Bridge vignette above and also visible in the clip *Our Own Private Island* (Figure 7.2)—is celebrated for its first-person viewpoint.⁶ Despite acknowledged issues with missing synaesthesia, it is valued for providing "dynamic, in-situ, insider perspective[s]" (Brown et al. 2008, 8) offering a gateway to accessing embodied, sensory, kinaesthetic and emotional knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, the hands-free auto-settings of POV cameras, while reducing the 'quality' of the footage (according to those valorising the technical processes and capacities of filmmaking), is seen as a more objective, less selective mode of recording. As a result, it is fetishised in a different

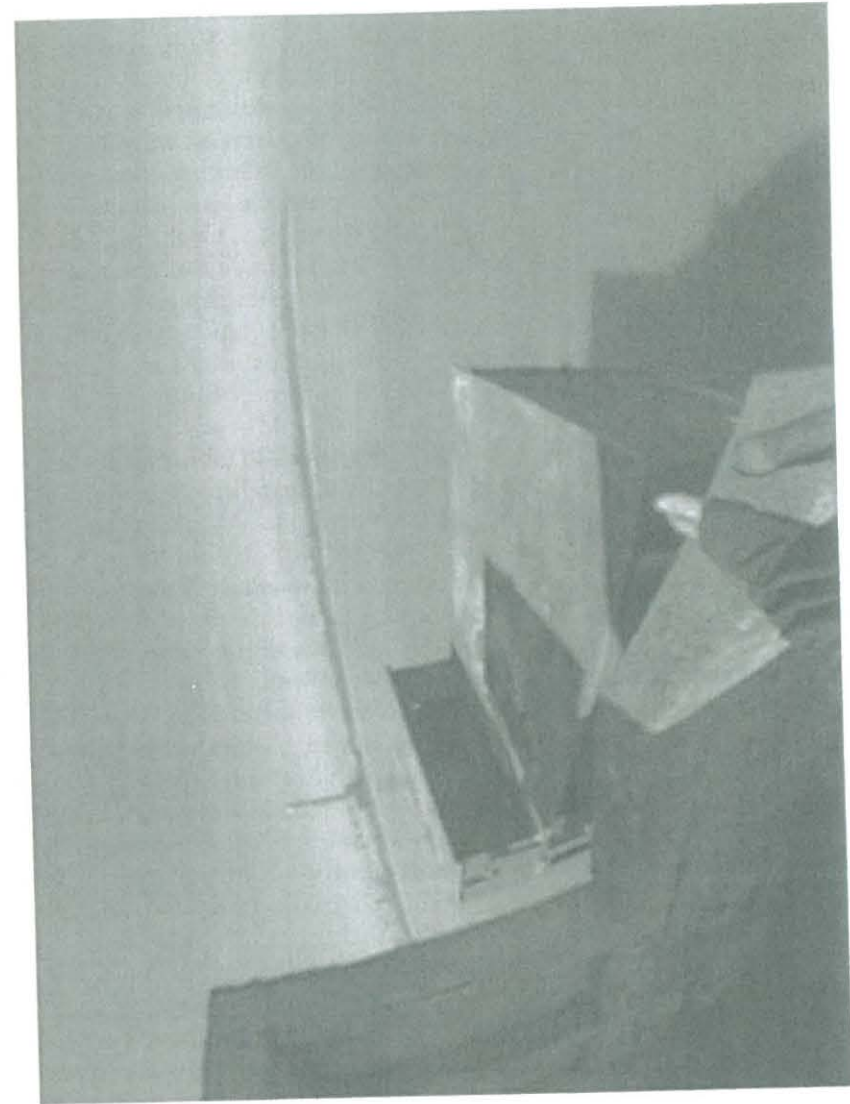


Figure 7.2 A still shot from the headcam in *Our Own Private Island*. Image: Bradley L. Garrett.

way, as offering a fuller picture of social life by virtue of its “capacity to record comprehensive, real-time activities, which capture the dramatic alongside the mundane without privileging either” (Brown et al. 2008, 7).

For us, what is especially noteworthy are the possibilities body-mounted POV equipment offer for experimentation with new modes and sites of enquiry, as the hands-free mode enables researchers to become more meaningfully engaged in practices. As Brown et al. (2008, 7) state, the ‘doing’ of research should not eclipse the ‘doing’ of the activity under research. There are compromises too, though, for footage depends completely on internal technology to deal with things like changing light situations, it presents an inability to do more than crude or rudimentary shot framings, and offers mediocre sound recording capability amidst shaky shots and repeated instances of accidental and failed recordings. We will return to these issues below, but to close this discussion of equipment we want to signal some of the more conceptual questions at stake here. For, as our experiences of filmmaking and other media projects have repeatedly demonstrated, the choice of equipment is as much philosophical and political as it is driven by the practical and aesthetic challenges of the task at hand (Garrett et al. 2011; Hawkins 2013a).

We want to signal the need to recognise the manifold productive agencies of our bits of kit. Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead famously noted the ‘observer effect’, a form of reactivity in which a researcher’s cognitive bias causes them to unconsciously influence the participants of an experiment (Mead 2001). Building on this, we are concerned here to note the agencies of equipment in the production of the researcher-subject, and the development of researcher-field relations. Thinking back to shouldered HDV cameras, and their perceived professionalisation of the researcher, we can reflect on the effect of other researcher-technology configurations on the researcher as a social, embodied and skilled subject. For urban explorers, the camera is an important prop in a number of regards, lending social legitimacy to them as artists, researchers or journalists (Bourdieu and Lamaison 1986, 113). The ubiquity of visual practices within the urban exploration community means that being an image-maker does not dichotomise researcher-community relations as it might in other research situations. What may mark out the researcher’s difference is, however, what they choose to shoot: focusing, for example, on action shots and ‘doings’ rather than goals.

There are other ways, too, that equipment produces, and perhaps even transforms, the researcher as an embodied and cognisant subject. We might think, for example, of how modes of visibility are shaped by looking through a viewfinder, developing, in aesthetic terms, a ‘good eye’ through experience. But this is an eye that also, over time, undergoes physiological changes, coming to focus in a different way as lens and muscle are honed by the repeated actions. Continuing with the theme of the visual, and returning to a point raised above, what tends to be overlooked in literatures on embodied ethnographies are the possibilities of video to render visible those things normally invisible to the human eye. As such, the camera works as a prosthesis,

with the latter understood less as making up for a lack and more for its opening up of possibilities for knowing and being in the world differently (Massumi 1992; Rouch and Feld 2003). This is to suggest the camera can extend the sensory capacities and affordances of the researcher’s body: whether it be picturing more detail than the human eye can process, or making visible things that move at speeds beyond human perception.⁷

A range of critical social theories offer fertile ground for taking forward these ideas of the technological-researcher-subject, for example Haraway’s (1991) cyborgs, or Simondon’s (2011) technological unconscious. Further resources can be found at the intersections of ethnographic and avant-garde filmmakers. We can think, for example, of the creative-informational cross-breeding that saw ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch celebrate the writings, films and manifestos of early 20th century experimental film maker Dziga Vertov, in particular his ‘*cine-eye*’ (Rouch and Feld 2003). Rouch’s ethnographic films were canonical works not only for visual anthropology but also in New Wave Cinema, influencing Jean-Luc Godard amongst others. Rouch writes of the shoulder-mounted camera as an appendage, an imaginary he develops into a figuration of an experienced-habituated cameraperson’s body:

Thus instead of using the zoom, the cameraman-director can really get into the subject. Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, he is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear.

(Rouch 2003, 90)

Such graftings of bodies and technologies, monstrous couplings, presage the Cyclops eye of the POV camera, and the cranial transplant that its footage provides: figuratively placing the head of the viewer onto the body of the researcher-participant. Such imaginaries enable further thinking on how these technologies remap researchers’ bodies and retool their senses, extending their corporeal affordances and capacities. To continue to develop these ideas, we want to turn now to consider the place of skill and creativity in the video-making process.

AUTOMATIC EXPOSURE: CREATIVE RESKILLING

Writings on videographic methods often laud the benefits of contemporary technology; it is affordable (to those doing the writing) and accessible in terms of being both ubiquitous and increasingly easy to use. Features such as auto-focus and in-camera editing capabilities enable, to borrow the language from geospatial scholarship, the amateurisation of video methods (Sui 2008). Keep in mind it was only a few years ago that Crang and Cook (2007) were noting the cost and complexity of video-making. While we would not want to suggest that such accessibility is in any way a bad thing,

we do want to caution against the assumed deskilling of the filmmaking process that often accompanies these ideas. Indeed, we would hazard the contrary, that such accessibility makes a consideration of skill sets, including the possibilities for creative experiments to push the limits of these pre-set technologies, all the more important.

Acquisition of skills facilitates and shapes the researcher's relationship with both footage and field. Learning to take good photos and to shoot good footage—with the definition of 'good' up for grabs—involves learning the capacities, affordances and limitations of your camera as intimately as those of your body, as well as learning to become attuned to fieldsites in new ways. The visual literacy associated with image-making folds together the technical with the aesthetic, knowing, for example, how to compose a shot, sensing what might best relay the feel of the moment. It also involves a sensing of site too, an entrainment of bodily capacities as senses become attuned to light levels, and an envisioning of framing through the lens before the shutter is even pressed.

The skills involved in filmmaking are those of building a cognitive and sensory relationship with technology (and site). The ideal version of this technological relationship is often cast, as Rouch above suggests, in terms of habituation. In other words, as Sontag (1977) implores us, we should work with an awareness of what is outside of the frame, labouring to prevent our attention being impeded by the technology. With this in mind, it seems that to be appropriately skilled is to be in possession of a level of comfort and familiarity with equipment that enables a working by feel. The result is an unconscious inhabitation of the frame of the viewfinder and the audio 'bubble' that the camera produces, such that the technical demands of the equipment do not pull the video-maker away from presence in place and moment.

The nature of skill and the human-technology relationship is thrown into sharp relief in the consideration of the contrast between tripod, hand-held and body-mounted cameras, which are all mobilised in the course of making video ethnographies of urban exploration. The process of carrying a tripod, pausing and carefully, even artfully, composing shots can be interruptive to the flow of social life, calling out the researcher *as researcher*, marking them out from the subject under scrutiny or disrupting their experiences. Furthermore, accrued aesthetic knowledge often informs the choice of visual device guiding the framing of the shot. We can compare, for example, the aesthetics of filmmaker Patrick Keiller's triptych of geographical films, *London*, *Robinson in Space* and *Robinson in Ruins*, with those of the urban exploration films being discussed here. In his deliberate choice of ponderous still shots, Keiller's films proffer a particular pacing of contemporary landscape and life that resonates with both the topographic tradition and the longer history of landscape aesthetics (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). By contrast, the choice to compose shot sequences as cinematic montage, to intersperse music with dialogue, and to vary camera angle and shot pace within the urban exploration videos has

more in common with contemporary imaginaries of mobility and urban space (Adey 2009).

The audiovisualities of the headcam, and its situation of skills, are rather different. The clip *Our Own Private Island* reinforces the common argument that when using a head-mounted camera, "the participant's role as film director becomes blurred with the life roles they are performing in the film, as there is no need to make conscious decisions about where to position and point the camera, or when to start and stop recording" (Brown et al. 2008, 5). The presence of the camera can indeed go relatively unnoticed by the user and the community, less by virtue of habituated use and rather as a result of the automated workings of these devices. Focus, light levels and shot are all determined in advance, either fixed, or only able to be manipulated in a minor way before the camera is body-mounted. For us, this is less evidence of a perceived deskilling, and suggests rather a relocation of key skills to other points in the filmic process, such as creative attachment to the body and editing.

The release of the need to be a skilful camera operator with POV cameras resituates skill as a form of experimentalism based in learning the capacities and affordances of technologies such that we might push at them, developing impromptu alternatives (Laurier et al. 2008). This might include deploying kit in new ways, or noodling with buttons and settings, stretching the limits of technologies and even hacking the procedural orders of firmware.⁸ This is precisely the opposite of enabling oneself to become habituated in the use of these technologies, or to become disempowered in the face of the continually 'designed', automated and controlled elements of the process. We want to encourage video ethnographers to experiment; indeed we would suggest that situated experimentalism is one of the key skill sets of video ethnographers. Of course, not all of the skills involved concern the ability to hone authorial control, and we should also acknowledge those forces that exceed intentionality, such as luck, serendipity and chance. We urge researcher-filmmakers, therefore, towards the recognition that the socio-technological formations we are working within are never static, and, as such, we can, and indeed should, work to stretch, extend and mould this formation. Our experiments might fail, but that is the nature of experiments (Davies 2010).

* * *

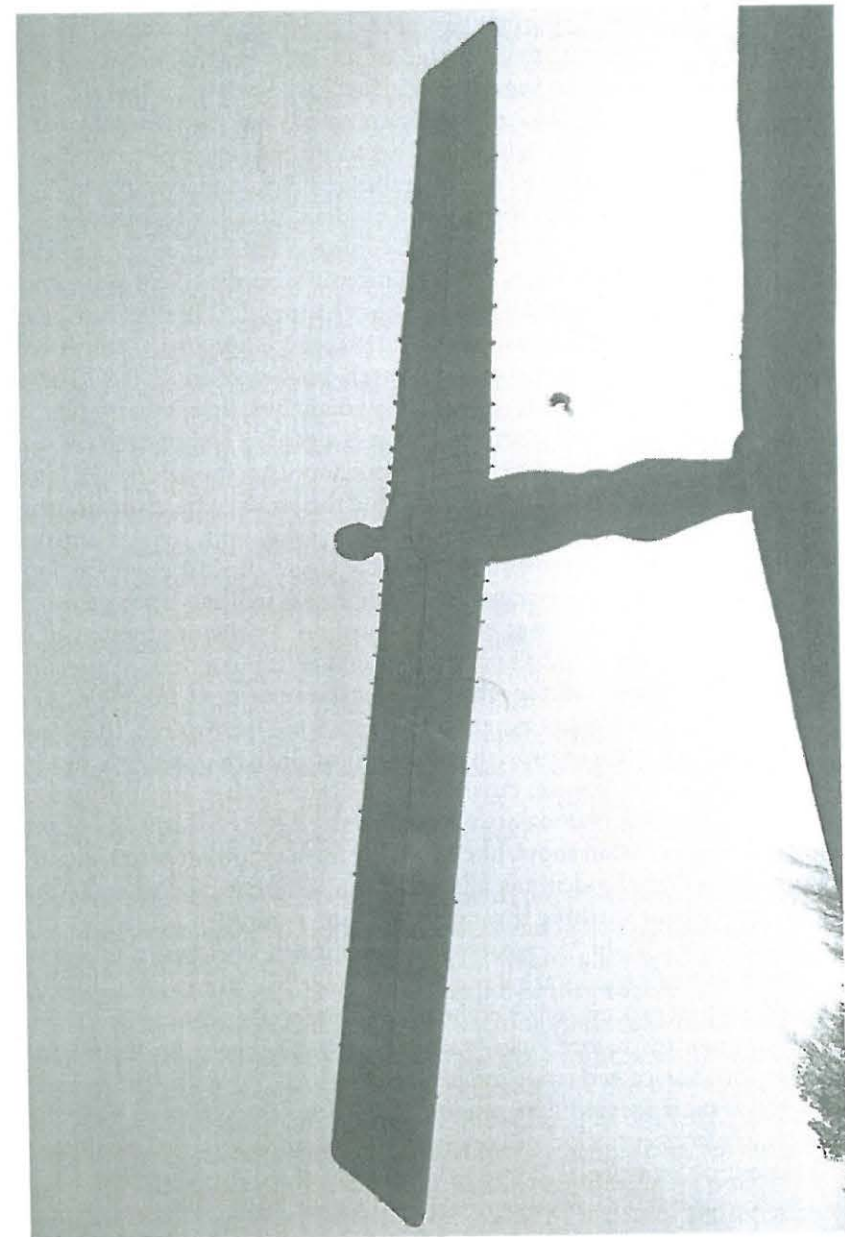
On the computer screen, in small partitioned windows inside Final Cut Pro, we are fast-forwarding and rewinding through images of an intervention at the *Angel of the North*.⁹ Editorial work, all consuming, proceeds slowly, especially at first, as we get to know the footage, labelling the individual sequences with descriptive titles for ease of identification, sorting the material, mentally consigning some as 'B roll'. These clips are not deemed visually or aurally robust enough to stand alone and must be parsed and layered with

other material to be made sense of. As we review the material repeatedly and feel our way around the footage, getting to know what is there, visually and sonically, the process becomes easier, more creative. We fix on a place to start, a strong clean studio shot and spoken description by the artist of her project's sensibilities. It is an alluring piece of footage for us, drawing the audience in with an enigmatic description of the piece, and creating the conceptual backdrop for the story we are editing the film to tell. As we drop visual and sonic fragments into the timeline, the story of the project unfolds, almost telling itself. The concern in these later stages of the edit is with retaining an arc that is enticing, which doesn't lose the thread of the story as we work for our future imagined audience. We restart the footage we have edited, watching through until a scene where someone begins to climb the statue on a rope. The action is jerky. Much from the footage produced by the POV camera strapped to the head of the climber is too dark, too shaky. Some of the sequences are too long. The levels of wind noise don't match from one scene to the next. We view, edit, review and edit again, making decisions about what dialogue and visual material is superfluous to the narrative. We smooth wind noise, tinker with light levels, trying one treatment, then another, rolling the audio and video back and forth.

As we work, narrative direction, technical experience and creative/aesthetic sensibilities merge with contingency and luck. Resonances reveal themselves, we are affected by the footage; we consider how we might engage with the non-representational in the film to generate affects in collaboration with it—whether that is even possible. The process becomes one of viewing and reviewing the same two or three seconds over and over again, listening to the levels of wind noise change with the direction of the microphone, trying to blend them so that they're not abrasive. In some places, we overwrite wind noises with ones from different clips. The light levels of the shots dance around, fine-fingered control of keys is trialled over and over again. Often voice intonation stymies the fineness of our editorial control, suggesting a conversation cut short or knowledge out of frame. Reviewing pulls us to the keyboard, screen and speakers, ears bent and eyes focused, fingers rhythmically tapping, moving frame by frame, 25 recorded frames per second. Voices are slowed down to unintelligibility.

Eventually the reviewing process is of sections of longer film, rather than bursts. We review the whole piece, make notes on what doesn't work, stopping the film to discuss. We go back and smooth, chop sequences too long for our imagined audience's attention span, play with shortening quotes, reject the changes, start again, undo. Eventually we have something that does the work we want it to do and we export the chopped, layered, mutilated audiovisual timeline into a slickly-packaged and compressed video file, 5% of its original form retained. The cutting room floor is a battlefield strewn with the dead and we are elated and exhausted.

* * *

Figure 7.3 *Cold Angel*. Image: Lucy Sparrow.

EDITING EXPERIENCE: SIFTING DIGITAL MATERIAL

The redistribution of skills throughout the image-making process sees editing becoming an increasingly important part of that practice. Our second vignette depicts us collaboratively editing footage of an ethnographic account of a public art intervention: *Cold Angel* led by artist Lucy Sparrow (Figure 7.3).¹⁰ The project was technically and physically complex, and the weather conditions far from ideal. This not only caused problems during the intervention's execution, but also presented editorial challenges. While many accounts of visual analysis have focused on the finished product, bringing to bear specific regimes of analysis, we want to engage with editing as itself a mode of analysis in the context of urban exploration. Emerging work on the editorial process has noted: the embodied experiences of editing (Laurier 2009); the technicalities and socialities of the process (Bauch 2010); and editing as a process of social empowerment in participatory research politics (Parr 2007). These examples show us that the editing process is an analytic and creative one; a process of sifting, sorting and composing that is a goal in and of itself.

Let us consider the practicalities of software and what it enables. We used Final Cut Pro, as did Bauch (2010), who highlights the effectiveness of a non-linear approach to editing, wherein the visual and sonic elements selected for inclusion are not delinked from the larger clips from which they are drawn until the final piece is exported. For Bauch, editing is a structured process, ordered from the outset by storyboarding, by the production of a 'script' for the voiceover, and the collecting and commissioning of specific footage. Even here, however, the editorial process emerges as a flexible, creative one, one that encourages experimentation. While easy to use, the setup of the clips and their coding in Final Cut Pro affords the user, we would argue, an experimental licence, cuts are not definitive, they are contingent, and the possibilities for playing are endless, enabled by the flexibility of the software's non-linearity. In short, like the move from typewriters to computers, the move to digital video has allowed for a different type of reskilling that is as much about working through as making record.¹¹

Backstopping the ability to creatively, yet critically, play with footage in the technical editing process are a number of other operations, not least of which is the culling process, wherein hours of footage are reduced to a more manageable quantity before finer-grained work can begin on individual scenes. The process of reduction of footage (only 5% used in the case of *Cold Angel*) was, it seemed, less one of cutting and more one of thematic excavation, the concentration of concepts, the intensification of ideas, and the refinement of trajectories. Key to the success of this process seemed to be the intimacy we built with our material (Laurier 2008). Practically, this process of becoming intimate might begin in the field, but it continues through the initial sorting and labelling of material and on into the repeated processes of viewing, reviewing and clipping.

Returning to the vignette, we want to acknowledge how the technical operations of the process, its more mechanical elements—smoothing over wind noise, regulating light levels, removing traffic sound—come together with aesthetic decisions to compose a story which moves past informational documentary evidence. Viewing *Cold Angel*, it should be clear how conventional grammars of film were deployed consciously or unconsciously. We see, for example, switches between view *of* and view *from* shots, e.g. the climber climbing the rope and the switch to the POV footage on the rope. These aesthetic decisions come together with a sense of the content of the footage, the narrative elements each clip contains, and how they slot into an overall narrative to present the story for an imagined audience. We experimented with classic aesthetic framings, shots of the *Angel of the North* silhouetted against the sunrise, for example, or sequences that make use of the operations of the sublime, drawing visual contrasts between the huge, hulking body and the small but animate climber scaling the stationary steel form.

These composed shots and edited sequences come together with other elements of the film. We experiment with framing the animation of the rope's flick and hollow thwack as it smacks against the metal body, the dynamic swish of the arrow as it leaves the bow, the repeated clunks as arrow after arrow hit the wing, the exuberant celebrations when persistence pays off. The aim is to form a shifting imagination that pushes at the edges of the visual and discursive content of the footage, creating a film that works on the body, making its way into the pulse. As such, the editorial decisions that define the final form of the film bring together aesthetic choices and judgements with technical abilities and limitations of the footage; what the software-operator-footage assemblages enables.¹² But there is also something else at work here, too. For reflecting on the process of becoming intimate with the footage, it was clear there were points where we moved beyond 'knowing' the multi-dimensional content of the footage, and into the flow of editing wherein the material seemed to take control, such is the affective force of footage and material interaction.

The vignette above enables us to begin to unpick editing as a complex and technical process, but also as an embodied and affective one, aimed at telling a story for an imagined future audience. While editing has been contained as a post-shoot process—a leaving "behind of the practices of recording and collection to create a filmic object"—such biographical narratives belie the interpenetration of sites of shooting, editing and presenting (Laurier 2009, 16). We can think, for example, of the reshoot of the opening of the hatch in the first vignette, a sort of in-the-field editing, with the composition and refinement of shots, deleting and reshooting, comprising an initial edit of sorts. It is not only editing than can be dislocated from its normative post-shoot position, but also viewing. Indeed, editing becomes a form of audiencing, constituted through multiple moments of viewing and reviewing. In the next section, we take these, and other audience events, seriously.

AUDIENCING: THE CREATIVE FORCE OF MEDIA

"Pics or it did not happen" is an oft-repeated refrain in the urban exploration community. It signals the key epistemological roles that images play within the community, sometimes to explorers' detriment, as when the images are used to prosecute 'trespassers' as proof of presence (Garrett 2013a). Such an interpretation of images as bearers of empirical truths reflects a scientised heritage of the pictorial that is by no means restricted to the urban exploration community. Its presence there, however, tends to deny the productive tensions surrounding the informational and the aesthetic that this chapter has been working with. To that end, we want to raise awareness of the need to be attentive to how our filmic outputs go to work in the world (Hawkins 2013a). Here we align video-making alongside geographical writings on the world-making capacities of creative productions, taking forward their replacement of creativity as a form of singular, human, authorial poesis, with a more distributed sense of creativity (Hawkins 2013a; Kanngieser 2013).

Writing on the process of ethnographic video-making, Laurier describes the filmmaker 'generously assembling' footage with respect to their audience(s). We take this point; its ramifications for filmmaking processes are clear in our account of editing *Cold Angel*. We were concerned to ensure our audiences learnt about the project, its motivations, processes and effects. Our assemblage of footage was conducted with an awareness that there was more than narrative at stake here. In other words, in our editorial processes we were attuned to how images and audio do work via discursive, informational and representational pathways, but also through a political forcefulness built through the sensory and affective.

To stay with the latter, geographers, especially those engaged with non-representational theories, are preoccupied with the possibilities of forms of knowledge that are about more-than-representational, more-than-discursive communication. As Latham and McCormack write, "images are also blocks of sensation with an affective intensity: they make sense not just because we take time to figure out what they signify, but also because their pre-signifying affective materiality is felt in bodies" (Latham and McCormack 2009, 253). Elaborating, they suggest images have the capacity to "produc[e] a certain affective resonance between somatic, visual, sonic and semantic rhythms, without necessarily reducing these to the terms of an interpretive narrative" (Latham and McCormack 2009, 260). The authors are referring to cinema in this passage, but we would contend the same is true of other filmmaking processes, "understood as an assemblage of technologies and techniques for the amplification of the cultural and corporeal logics of affect" (Carter and McCormack 2006, 230). In other words, configured as bodies of affective intensity, images have the capacity to affect other kinds of bodies, specifically here, human bodies. Returning to our opening vignette, we relayed the facts of that climb across the bridge, but we also wanted to push at words, sounds

and images to generate sensations and feelings, to place you in the midst of the exploration, to generate viscosity.

The urban exploration video ethnographies that we examine in this chapter have been viewed hundreds of thousands of times online, at festivals, in theatres and in academic presentations. Reactions ranged from the critical, where scholars labelled them "music videos devoid of ethnographic content"; to the visceral, where online commentators emphasised their "sweaty hands"; to the excited and inquisitive, as the films appeared to open out imaginative spaces, enticing people to push their own boundaries, resulting in constant requests to join the explorations. As filmmakers, and especially as makers of video ethnographies, geographers need to remain aware of this contagious quality of composing associative sensation and mobilising affect. We must not lose sight of how the work our productions do will remain beyond our authorial control. For, affect and multi-sensuous experience are felt and interpreted in situated ways, based on experiences combined with ingrained memories and culturally codified viewing/listening conventions. As Dewsbury writes,

non-representational theories provide an important and ongoing cautionary note about how images—like words—are always failing: about how they do not provide dependable techniques of capturing and accounting for the moment. . . . Yet the upshot of this is not the dismissal of practices such as writing, drawing, photographing and filming, but a rethinking of the terms of their use.

(Dewsbury 2009, 324)

The 'rethinking' we wish to foreground concerns the possibilities of creative productions, but also an awareness of those dimensions beyond our control. As units of information and mechanic blocks of sensation thrust into the world, images are possessive of their own forcefulness, but can also be mobilised by others. The films and photographs of the urban exploration community have a wide circulation resulting in the creative experimental reuses of these images and films as they are posted and reposted, blogged about, shared, collaged, remixed and generally hacked to produce new work.

One of the drivers of this chapter has been a framing of tensions between, and possible re-combinations of, the informational and the aesthetic; the captured and the created. As our creative productions circulate and go to work in the world, their manifold aesthetic and experimental intents can become stripped back. The images are made to bear the burden of proof, their perceived mimetic force overriding any ficto-critical and aesthetic intent, potentially recasting ethnographic footage and filmic creations as incriminating, condemning 'evidence'. As such, while we talk about the creative-critical-technical processes of creation, and the imaginative and political work we envision, we should remain aware of the ethics and responsibilities that inhere within image-making when these forms become mobilised to ends beyond authorial control.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS CREATIVE VIDEO ETHNOGRAPHIES

Ethnographic places are not simply made in the moments that they are lived. Rather they are crafted over longer periods of interaction and intellectual activity.

(Pink 2008, 190)

This chapter has taken seriously Pink's suggestion of the extended times and spaces for creation in ethnographic accounts. We have integrated an exploration of field-based phenomenological moments with multiple sites of video-making, viewing and editing. In so doing, we have advanced the critical frame of what Garrett has explored as "glass geographies," referencing both the nature of the medium and the various under-articulated fragilities of these methodologies (Garrett 2013c). Our intent was to develop an account of video ethnographies that is perhaps both more critical and more creative than many more practically-oriented accounts allow for. Where Rancière wrote of photography that it is "not merely mechanical reproduction, but rather an interpretation of the world" (Rancière 2009, 8), we have embraced and extended this notion to suggest not only "an interpretation of the world," but also an appreciation of the creative makings of worlds, subjects and knowledge (Hawkins 2013a).

Akin to the figuration of the artist, developed by Simmel and others, the work of the researcher and ethnographic filmmaker is often understood as slicing out pieces from "endlessly continuous sequences of perceived experience", capturing something, making it digestible, portable, sellable (Simmel 1971, 189). This is clear in the formulations of video footage as naturalistic data, understood to provide a scientised, objective account, privileged for its production of better—read more accurate—'pictures' of life. Where more recent work has appreciated the created-constructed nature of the film as research artefact, we have worked to expand this perspective to make claims for the creative force of video ethnographies. We would argue that the researcher who uses video methods merely to capture and slice out a section of social life is at best missing some of the potentials and possibilities of these methods, and at worst is doing them a violence and a disservice. What we have sought to do here is to begin to develop a sense of what an alternative—a critical creative videography—might look like, weaving this sense of creativity throughout an expanded field of film-making.

Questions of creativity and criticality within the ethnographic video-making process guided our discussion of this urban exploration research project, whether this be creatively experimenting with technologies, or appreciating a range of different points of skilling within the filmic process. Examining editing as a creative-analytic process we also draw out, as we did with our discussions of equipment, how these negotiations form intimate relationships between the researcher, technology and footage. Finally, and most clearly in our discussion of the audience of these ethnographic films, we emphasised

the need for further attention to the variety of 'work' films do, but also that the filmmaking process can do, noting how these films go to work in the world, and how researcher-subjects are produced in their making.

We have argued that to develop and appreciate creative video ethnographies is to push at the edges of the technologies and procedures of filmmaking. This is to move beyond the perception of video as fieldnotes and video as interpretation, to give consideration to the creative process, to viewers, and to the socio-technical formations that constitute multimedia geographies (Richardson-Ngwenya 2014). These are creative practices, forces and objects that, we would emphasise, have the ability to make, and potentially to remake, subjects, knowledge and worlds in imaginative, critical and politically forceful ways.

NOTES

1. We might think here of an obvious example—Simon Faithfull's *Escape Vehicle No. 6 (chair in space)*, a project which he describes as a "journey of a domestic chair from the earth to the edge of space". Faithfull goes on to suggest that "the chilling nature of the film is that the empty chair invites the audience to imagine taking a journey to an uninhabitable realm where it is impossible to breathe, the temperature is minus 60 below and the sky now resembles the blackness of space": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wnyp3Nrp0w
2. Depth-of-field is the distance between the nearest and farthest objects in a scene that appear in focus in an image.
3. Such collaborative working resonates with a range of ways ethnographic research subjects can and have been mobilised in the co-creation of ethnographic data; a process that gives agency to participants through collaboration rather than "giving the camera away" (Ramella and Olmos 2006) in a participatory video model.
4. The camera was a Canon 5D Mark III for those interested. The Canon 5D Mark II and Nikon D800 are also great pieces of 'all-in-one' full-frame photography/videography kits.
5. The *Hobohemia* travelogue triptych is a series of ethnographic videos about travelling through, and sleeping in, ruins in eight different European countries. The videos can be found on the Place Hacking channel on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/channels/placehacking>
6. *Our Own Private Island*, a short video about camping overnight on an abandoned military river fortification as the tide traps us, can be viewed at: <https://vimeo.com/64600820>
7. For example, the *Slow Mo Guys* have recorded a gun being fired underwater at 27,000 frames-per-second and then slowed the footage down to open up new realms of aural/visual perception: <http://youtu.be/OubvTOHWTms?t=2m52s>
8. In one particularly artful non-human deployment, a seagull snatches a POV camera and places it on a ledge out of reach with a satisfied squawk. The viewer is left wondering how the camera, and therefore footage, was located and recovered: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLu5B3Fsstg>
9. *Angel of the North* is Anthony Gormley's 20-meter tall steel Angel sculpture, with a wing span of 55 meters that overlooks Gateshead, UK.
10. *Cold Angel* is artist Lucy Sparrow's playful engagement with Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North*. Sparrow writes, "myself and three others embarked on a project of epic knitted proportions to create a scarf that would fit the Angel

- of the North sculpture in Gateshead": <http://sewyour soul.co.uk/2013/07/23/cold-angel-short-film-documentary/>
11. We can think, for example, of how the editorial process can itself be played with. In *Jute*, an experimental film produced about Dundee, Scotland, a role-reversing experimental editing of sight to sound played with ways of knowing place (Garrett et al. 2011).
 12. If effective editing, and certainly if experimental editing is to take place, it is also perhaps useful to appreciate something of the materialities of digital images and their composition, apprehending them as intersections of movement, rhythm, speed, flow, refraction, sensor capacity, glass dynamics, light sources, processing power, weight, intensity, strength, software rendering capabilities, imagination and interaction.
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8 Working with Sound in Video

Producing an Experimental Documentary about School Spaces

Michael Gallagher

SOUNDING VIDEO

As someone with a long-standing interest in sound, it has often struck me as odd that uses of video in research should be characterised as visual methods. The entire field of visual methods is already problematic enough since, as Ingold (2007) points out, it tends to reduce the visual—practices of seeing—to a much narrower set of concerns surrounding the production and reception of visible images. But even if we were to reframe visual studies more specifically, as studies of visible images, where would that leave film and video, with their integration of light and sound?

“Offering three decades of silent films as Exhibit A, scholars have for years pursued their arguments in favor of cinema’s visual nature” (Altman 2004, 6). But over the last couple of decades, a number of more aurally-attuned film studies writers have argued that cinema is essentially audiovisual (Altman 1992, 2004; Beck and Grajeda 2008; Chion 1994, 2009; Weis and Belton 1985), calling attention to the varied soundings of film, from the incidental noise of “the kids in the front rows, the air conditioner hum, the lobby cash register” (Altman 2004, 6) and the clacking and whirring of projectors, to the lecturers, live pianists, theatre organs and orchestral accompaniments that soundtracked early cinema. The very notion of ‘silent film’ turns out to be something of a misnomer (Brown and Davison 2013). My own vinyl collection offers up a little evidence of this lively history of cinematic aurality. ‘The World of the Cinema Organ’ was a classic charity shop find by a friend, a 1971 Decca LP of reissued 78 rpm recordings from leading lights of the UK cinema organ scene such as Reginald Dixon, Sidney Torch and Dudley Beaven. Its faded cover shows a besuited gentleman seated at an enormous white Wurlitzer console with four manuals and raked banks of stop-keys. From the 1930s, this hefty chunk of film audio hardware was in regular use at a luxurious art deco cinema in Tooting, London, now a Grade 1 listed Gala bingo hall.

The emerging audiovisual sensibility in film studies is taking some time to seep into work on video methods. Compare, for example, composer and film sound writer Michel Chion’s (1994) conception of cinema as “audio-vision”