

**Participatory visual and digital research in action**, edited by Aline Gubrium, Krista Harper, and Marty Otañez, New York, NY, Routledge, 2015, 296 pp., US\$36.95 (paperback), ISBN 9781629580555

What happens when well-known visual and digital research methods take a ‘participatory turn’ in community-based and collaborative research? This question underpins this edited collection, which deftly crosses boundaries between the social and health sciences, design, and technology. The contributing authors bring into view the diverse lives of their participants, who are often in difficult-to-access communities, profiling both the prospects and challenges associated with participatory research. The complexity of voices, identities, stories, and perspectives they feature serve to deepen our understanding of the human condition.

The book is divided into six parts, each offering detailed descriptions of how researchers, many taking Freire as their inspiration, expertly and innovatively use well-known visual and digital methods in Participatory Action Research (PAR). In Part 1, the use of digital storytelling is showcased in studies involving political asylum seekers in Ireland and those living with Hepatitis C in Denver. The researchers demonstrate the complexities of participatory knowledge construction across sites of both collaboration and contestation as they engage in new ways of listening through visual, inquiry-based approaches to storytelling, and as they mentor research participants in the use of digital technologies.

Part 2 addresses issues that arise in using Photovoice in collaborative research with racialised women in a black neighbourhood in Toronto and in urban studies of how emerging technologies can serve societal needs. These studies give prominence to research practices that prioritise informed action and innovation through multi-layered reflection. The researchers’ iterative approaches reveal the complexity of the research problems undertaken, complicating understanding by asking deeper questions, engaging in richer conversations, and foregrounding the nuances of process. The methods uncover what can happen when research is adapted to participants’ stories, intended audiences, and multiple purposes.

Part 3 provides veteran examples of PAR in collaborative film and video production featuring indigenous communities and youth health literacies. These distinct and sometimes hidden worlds are made visible through innovative visual methods that inspire possibilities for other researchers to improvise both in developing their own approaches to researching real lives and people, and in engaging publics for intervention and advocacy.

The studies in Part 4 provide examples of the ground-breaking use of geographic information systems (GIS) software with participatory mapping, photovoice, digital storytelling, and digital spatial and visual ethnography. The studies uncover the accretive layers of problems such as accessibility and disability, environmental change, and representations of difficult heritage, unmasking power asymmetries, the spatial nature of injustice, and the unexpected methodological, political, and ethical terrain of using GIS in PAR. In letting go of research expectations, the research is at once evocative and transformational, enabling new ways of representing the past and envisioning the future through the visual.

Part 5 takes PAR into digital archives and museums, transporting us across time and space in inspired ways. The collaborative work in this section demonstrates how PAR as part of archival and museum research can validate the history and identity of individuals and communities. The studies include Somali refugees in Maine, the Calumet National Heritage Area in Chicago, and a website designed to introduce aspects of Lima, Peru to visitors. The researchers engage groups of participants who may not ordinarily be in dialogue together, promoting new understandings, perspectives, accessibility, and public relevance. Through the careful and

conscious design of reflexivity and perspective-taking, space for multiple voices and identities is created through both the visual and the digital.

Part 6 brings participatory design ethnography together with art and user-focused technology through co-operative, egalitarian processes that encourage a much deeper and more diverse understanding of a range of issues, including power, ethics, and public applicability. The researchers' adaptations are new experiments in representational practice that redefine 'failure' by embracing the 'messiness' and unpredictability of what happens when control over the research process is shared by collaboratively building and designing research from the ground up. The rich outcomes and perspectives from studies focused on good library design, homeless youth in Los Angeles, and app design in networked anthropology inspire a sense of what is possible when research embodies a playful and flexible approach.

This edited volume makes two important contributions to social science research: methodological innovation and encouragement to embrace the intrinsic 'messiness' of participatory research. First, the contributing researchers engage their participants in the inventive use of visual and digital methods to bring into the conversation ideas and thoughts that might not be as readily expressed in language. By remixing and reinventing the visual and the digital in PAR, they are able to align mode of representation and dissemination with the communicative practices that are valued in particular communities, thereby prioritising the most apt mode of expression. Although arguably the innovation of this collection creates a tension between traditional and creative multimodal methods in terms of what counts as research evidence, the researchers convincingly push the boundaries of what it means to do social science research in the twenty-first century. They move well beyond the academy in terms of audiences and impact, amplifying the voices, skills, and knowledge of less powerful groups and individuals, and diminishing the traditional notion of 'researcher-as-expert'. Across all of the studies, I found myself wanting to know more – more about the authors, the methodologies, and the challenges of analysis when dealing with multimodal data, particularly when both process and product are equally emphasised.

Second, the contributing scholars authentically embrace the messiness of negotiated, collaborative, and community-based research by relinquishing control over the research process. Rather than subscribing to the long-perpetuated illusion of the 'neat and ordered' research study, the means of research are taken as seriously as the ends. We benefit tremendously from this insiders' perspective on process, as the authors courageously explore the power imbalance between researcher and researched; experiment with different roles, strategies, purposes, and outcomes; and embrace the unexpected as 'fabulous failures' or 'creative misuse'. Our identities as researchers, our relationships with our participants, and our responsibilities for advocacy and to a wider public are provocatively called into question. The collection overall provides inspiration and permission for researchers to engage in more creative, multimodal and collaborative research that enhances the quality and depth of participant engagement and social transformation.

This forward-looking collection has important implications for how and why we do research in the social sciences. It takes as its purpose advocacy and transformation for individuals and society, and raises critical questions about ethics, culture, and power in participatory research at a time when both the visual and digital are rapidly transforming societies. The content will appeal to a wide interdisciplinary audience across the social sciences, health, education, and social services. It is a must read for both seasoned and novice researchers, practitioners, and activists engaged in developing their own innovative research designs and advocating for social change.

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**What's a Cellphilm? Integrating mobile phone technology into participatory visual research and activism**, edited by Katie MacEntee, Casey Burkholder, and Joshua Schwab-Cartas, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, Sense Publishers, In Press, US \$54.00 (paperback), ISBN: 9789463005715

In its simplest definition, cellphilm is a word derived from the hybridisation of cellphone and film; however, the answer to the question 'What is a Cellphilm?' proves to be much more evasive. The authors in this collection grapple with an innovative visual methodology that involves much more than simply making films on one's cellphone. Working beyond simplistic definitions of cellphilms, the multi-disciplinary contributors to this collection consider the various uses, strengths, and complexities of cellphilm as a research methodology, using case studies from around the world.

All 12 chapters in this volume offer insight into the challenges and advantages of using personal information and communication technology (ICT) in participatory research for social change. Given the increasing use of cellphones across the globe, the authors argue that cellphone technology enables participants to produce, create, watch and share media content with relative ease. Cellphilm provides new opportunities for bottom-up research that places the participant at the centre of visual representation, valuing participants' perspectives with limited intervention from researchers. The volume *What's a Cellphilm?* engages, by and large, with the work of new scholars who are exploring the novelty and potential of a visual research method that could assist in further democratising the research process. The contributions of more established scholars work to demonstrate the evolution of cellphilm and add dimension to the ways in which researchers and participants engage with local technologies.

The introduction outlines four themes that work together to weave the cellphilm into a larger tapestry that establishes the diverse uses and applications of cellphilm in research: (1) cellphilms from the professional to the personal, (2) cellphilms as pedagogy, (3) cellphilm dissemination and audiences, and (4) cellphilm technologies and aesthetics. The volume concludes with a conversation between the editors about the future uses of cellphilm and poses many new questions for the continued study of cellphilm. In the introduction, Katie MacEntee, Casey Burkholder, and Joshua Schwab-Cartas elaborate on cellphilm's potential to move away from saviour mentality research towards methodologies in which researchers learn from communities in community-driven and community-directed ways. They are also careful, however, to caution readers that cellphones are not inherently transformative, but rather are made transformative through the ways in which people use them to create knowledge and to look critically at the world around them. The editors draw clear distinctions between videos made on cellphones and cellphilms, arguing that cellphilms are differentiated by their overt intent to create and mobilise knowledge.