

## Visual Ethnography

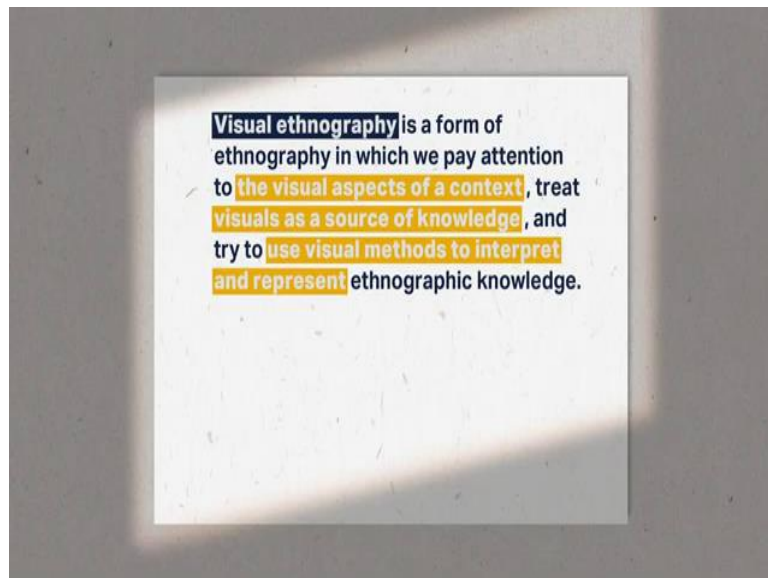
### Module 7 Section 1

#### Lecture 52

#### Introduction

Hello and welcome again, the focus of our course has been to engage with the other and to learn through this engagement. In each of our modules, we have discussed different ways of engaging, observing, conversing, participating and so on. These are all paths of learning. In this module, we will discuss another way of learning which is visual ethnography.

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As the name suggests, it emphasises the centrality of the visual in our experience of the world.

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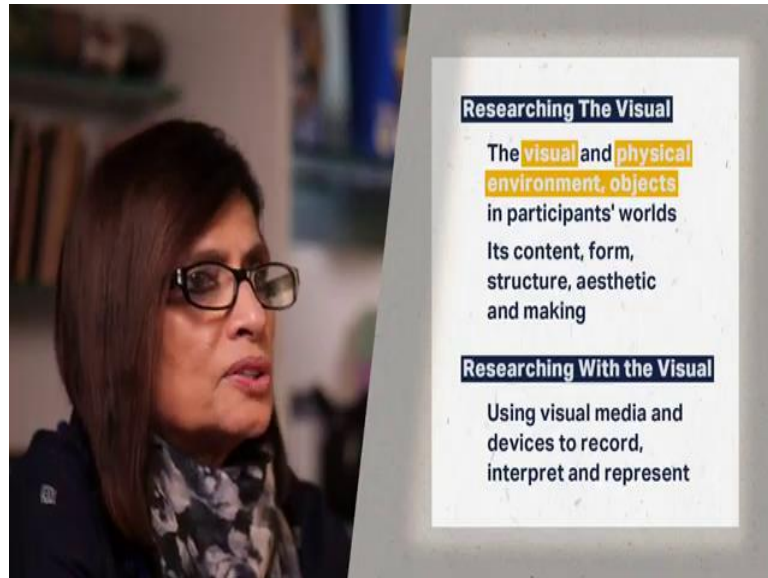
Our understanding and knowledge of our world is rooted in how we experience it through our bodily interactions particularly through sight or seeing. Visual ethnography gives primacy to our visual or sight-based experiences and understanding.

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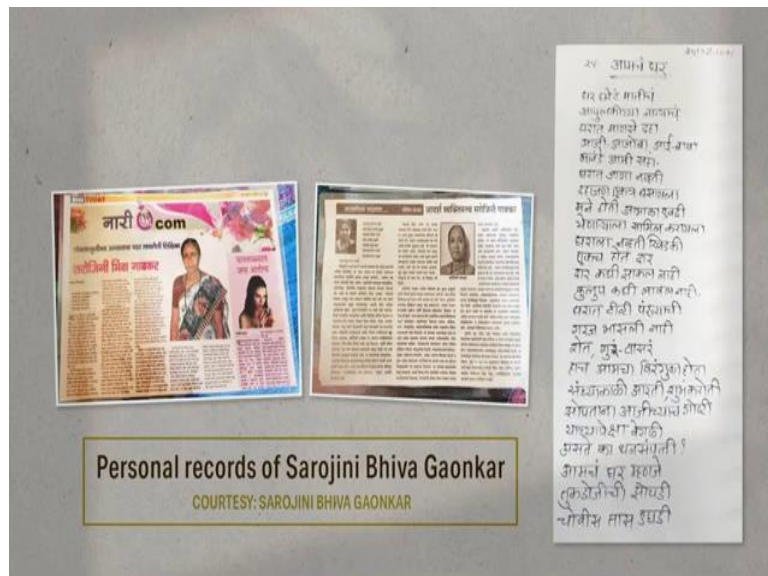
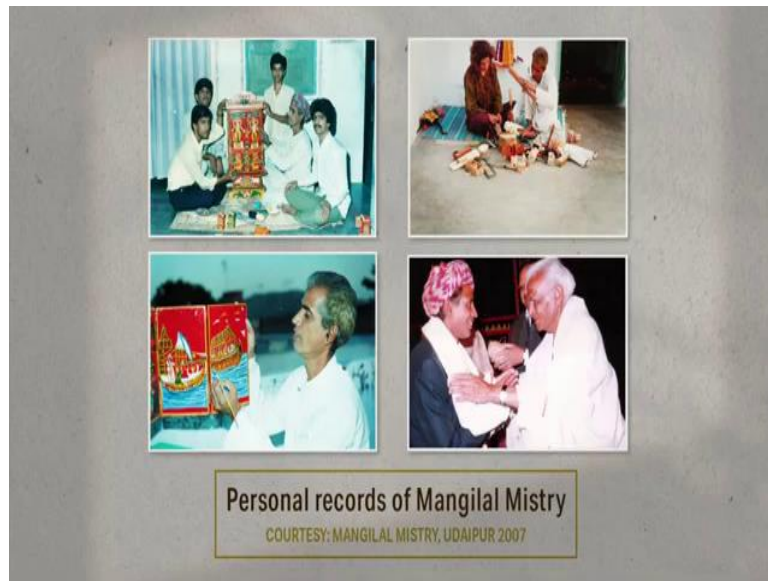
Let us begin with asking ourselves. What does it mean to do visual ethnography? Broadly speaking, we may do this in two different ways.

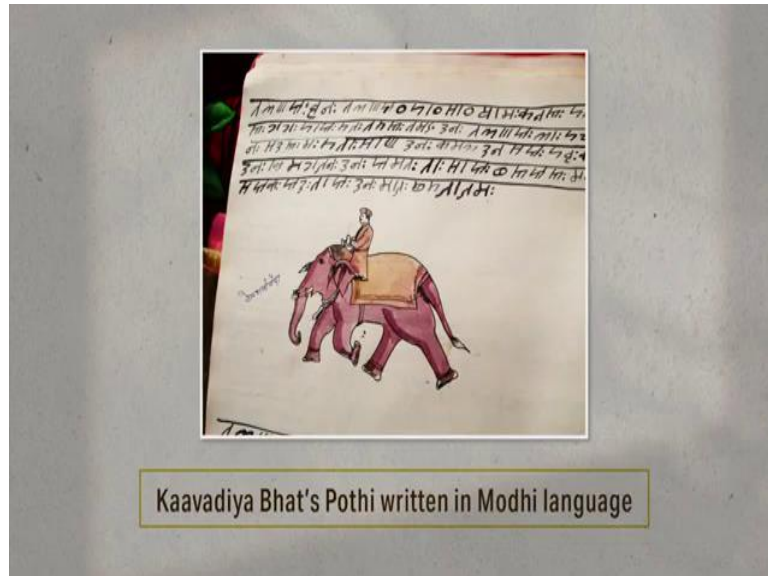
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The first of this researching the visual, it is where we study the visual and physical objects that exist in the worlds of our participants.

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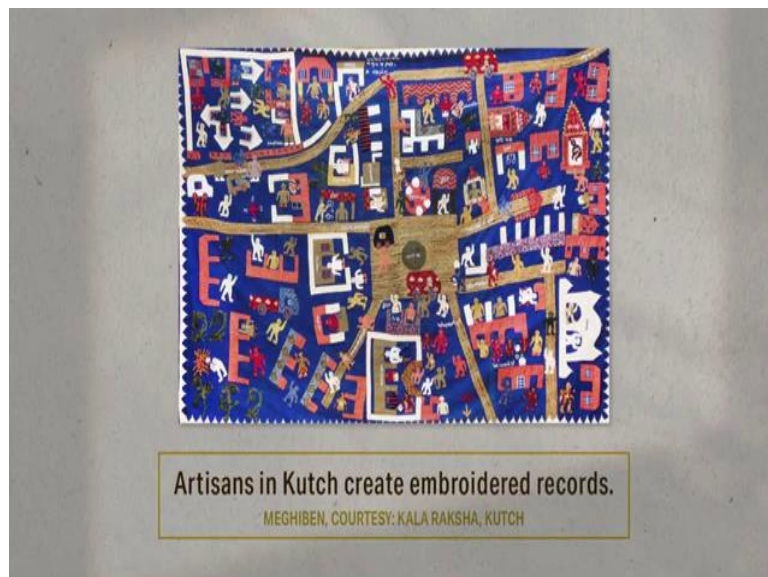




Kaavadiya Bhat's Pothi written in Modhi language

For example, they may have personal records such as photographs, photo albums, newspaper clippings, paintings and so on. And then they may be objects that are not primarily visual but certainly have a visual aspect to them.

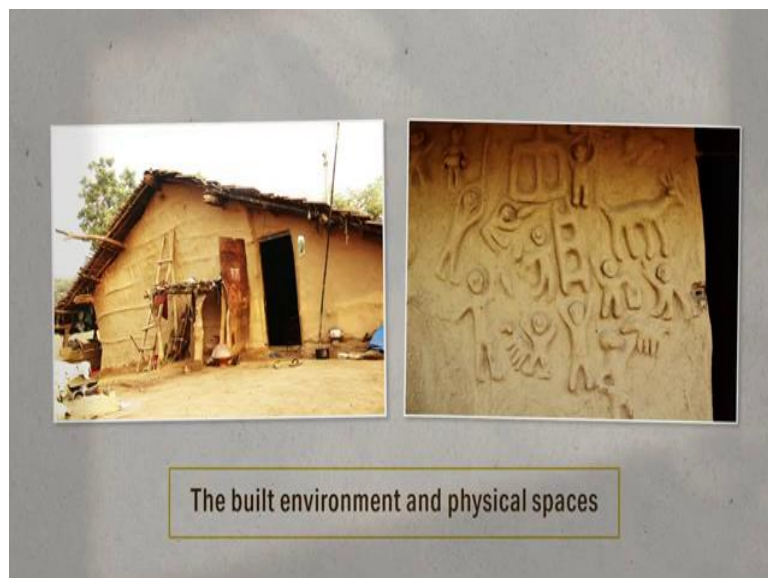
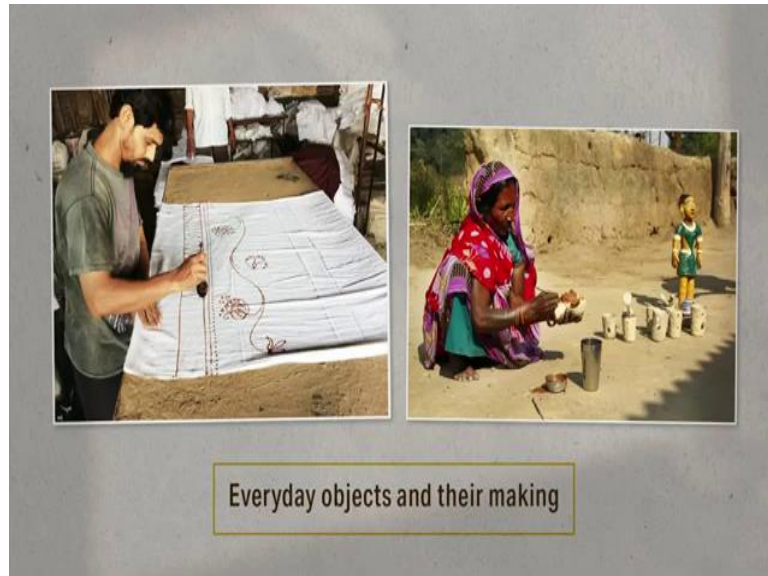
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Artisans in Kutch create embroidered records.

MEGHIBEN, COURTESY: KALA RAKSHA, KUTCH





Embroidery, patterns on clothes, the architecture and decor of houses and so on. Each of these reveals something of the underlying beliefs, ideas and even histories of a community the visuals we research may be tangible such as the Kaavad story boxes, or they may be intangible such as visuals on film or digital media. There is a common thread that runs through all works that research the visual, researchers treat visual objects as the voices and expressions of their participants and construct knowledge based on what the visuals express.

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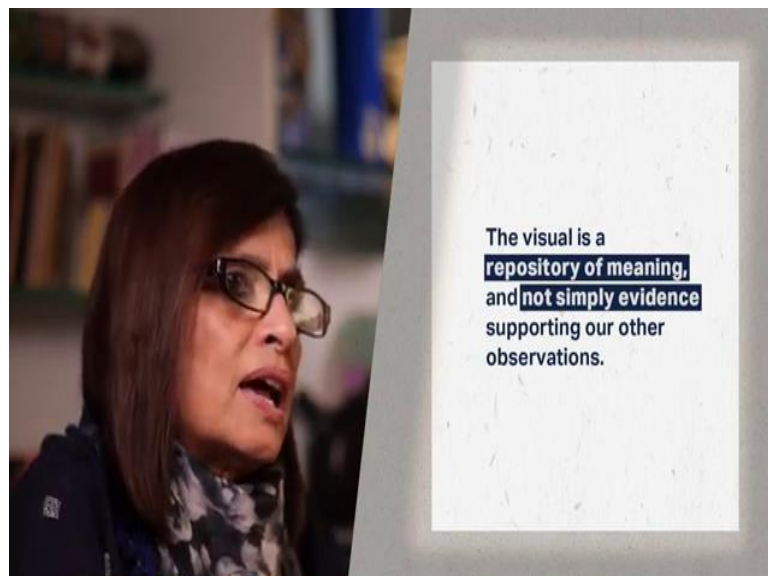
The content form structure, aesthetic, making of visuals.. It is by analysing these that we arrive at meaning and ethnographic knowledge.

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Now, we come to the second way of doing visual ethnography, which is to research which the visual Here, we use visual devices such as drawings, photographs or videos to record and represent the worlds of our participants. We can use visual media to interpret and represent what we learn. So, for example, we could make a film or a photo essay or an illustrated book that represents our observations and our analysis.

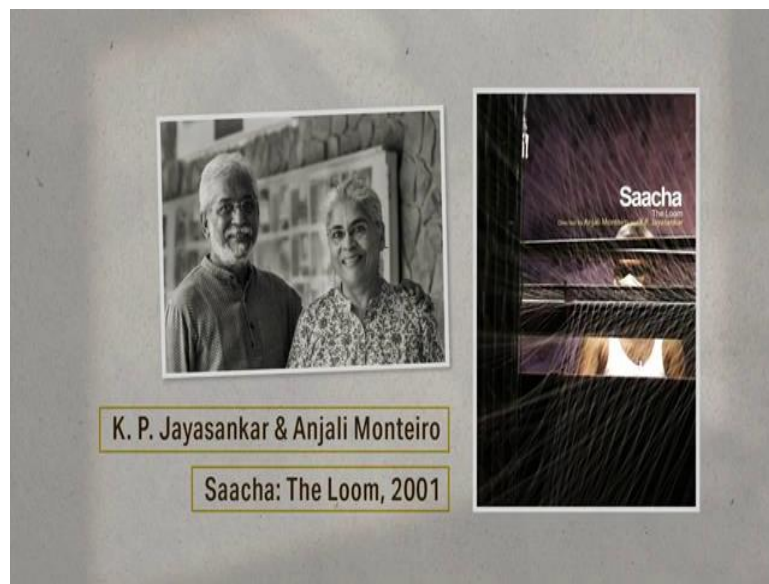
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In using visuals in our research, it is important that we see the visual as a research tool that contains meaning and not as mere evidence or proof of our observations.

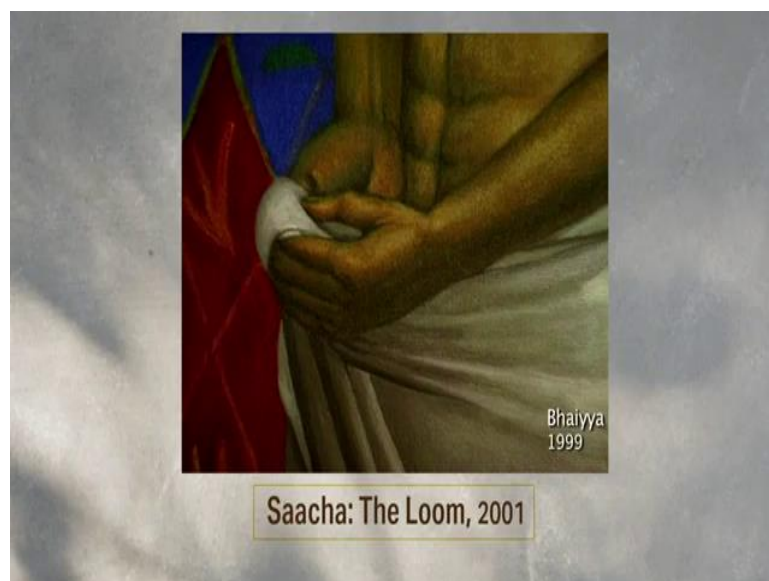


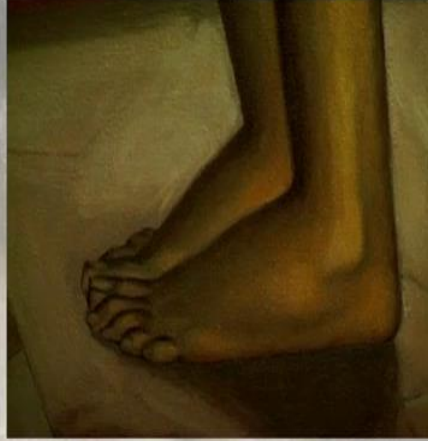
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Consider for example, this short video clip from the film *Saacha*, the loom by filmmakers and researchers Anjali Monteiro and KP Jayasankar.

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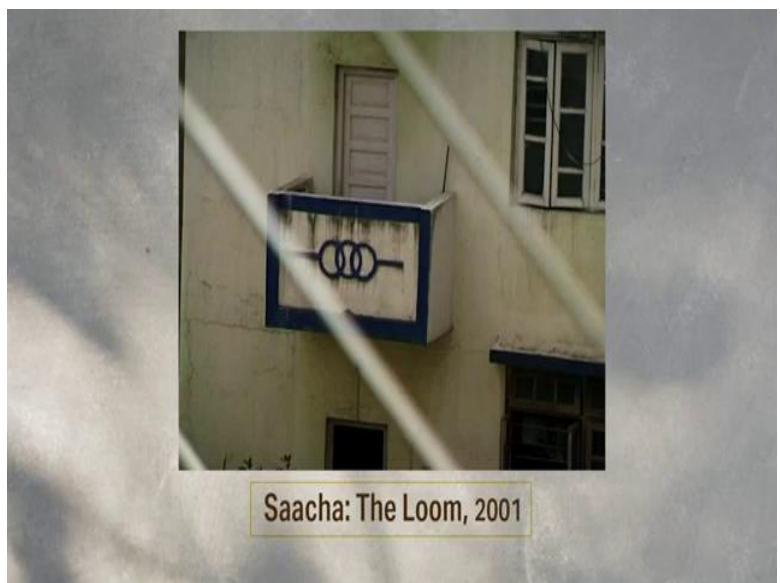
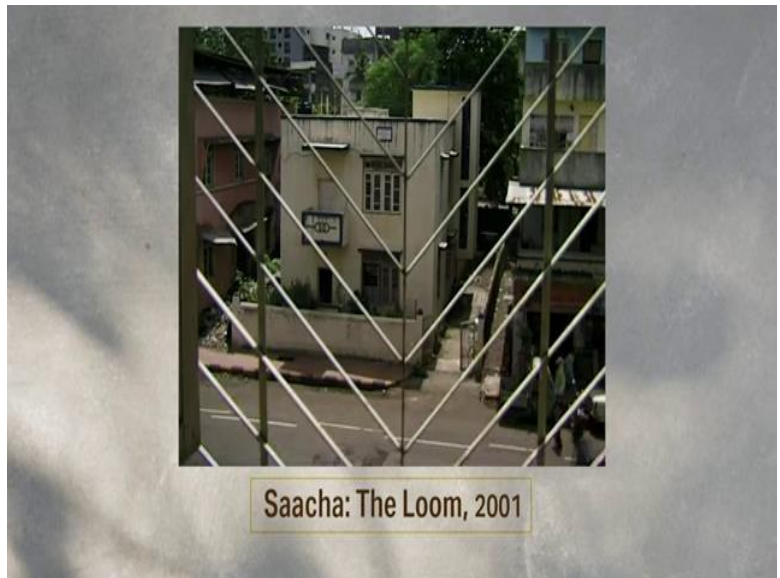
Saacha: The Loom, 2001

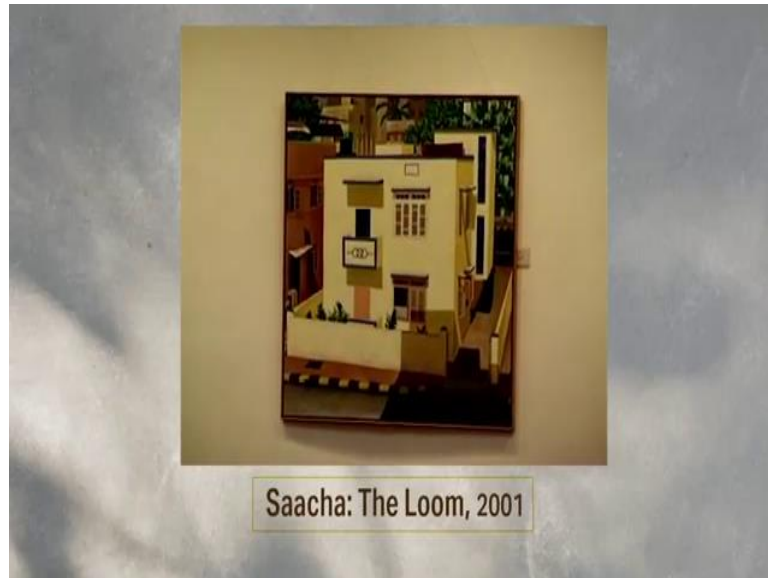


Saacha: The Loom, 2001



Saacha: The Loom, 2001





When I started doing these landscapes in Pokhran I thought was a the third possibility of being neither a spokesman or an observer, but being a participant in our community as an artist was opening out to me, because immediately when I started this, of course, small children would come and sit around you and we would you know, ask questions what you will and they contribute a lot. I had considered earlier also how artist was committed to left ideology would become in some senses participant with the class that he is representing.

And it was always linked to projecting some kind of an ideological content, you know about struggle about classes about emancipation. I wanted my work at that time not to have any of this content, but purely to be how these people visually appropriate their surrounding.

When I was painting there, I was thinking about how these people are reacting to it visually and whether my working there is, you know in some senses contributing to their experience of their reality and things like that when one chap suddenly asked me why I was coming and painting this locality and probably go and sell it outside and make money.

So, this definitely a kind of puts you in a puts spot because that is exactly what actually will be doing. This person asked me how much would you sell it for? And I did not have the heart to tell him the actual price of this voice and reduced it by a few thousand and said a couple of thousand maybe and things like that that also was quite a bit for him.

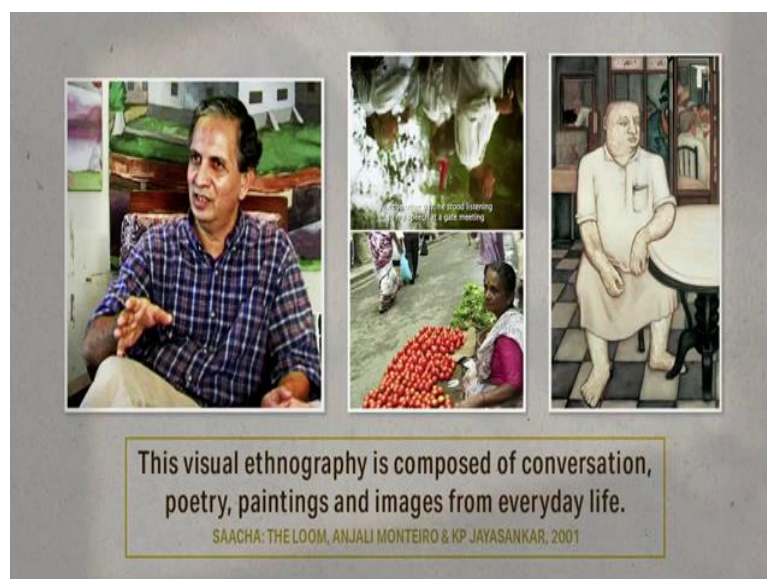


All that an artist is doing is in that sense immediate through the agenda of the art world and artist is really may be accepting the agendas that the art world is setting for him. And for me the question of the relevance of my work to the people that are around me and whose experience I share for living in the same kind of surroundings the same city the same town whatever. I think there is a need to relate to outside the art world to the society of large.

Translated to English: To reassure oneself everyday and live, it is getting tough. How far does one console oneself, it is getting tough? I soothe and put the howling heart to sleep, though I see the grain sack stuffed with sawdust in front of me to stop, it is tough. Live and let live. So, I live, everyday it is getting tough. To deny one's existence, it is getting tough. I understand and convince myself but even after that if I do not fall in line. A lit matches would not fall into the godown. To guarantee this, it is getting tough.

The film sequence that we watched is constructed from the words of the artist, the visuals of his paintings, the narrated poem scenes from the art gallery and from the vegetable market.

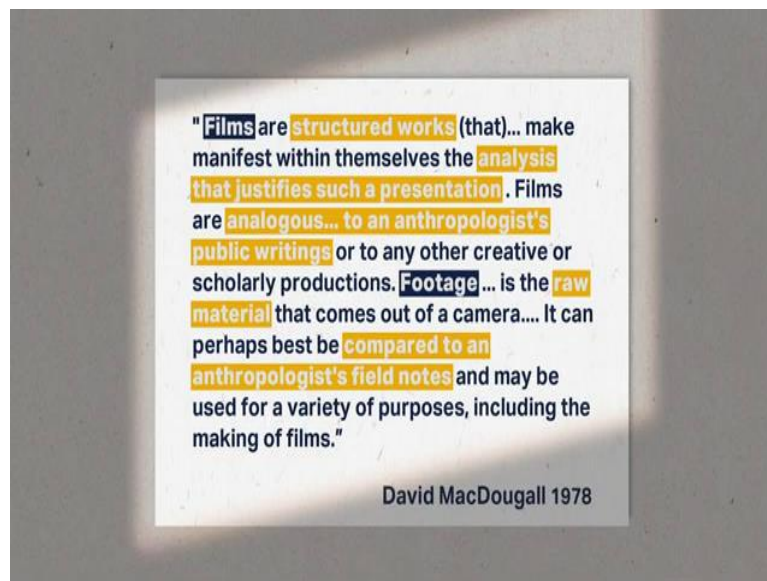
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These visuals and words carefully stitched together convey meaning. They depict the class differences that mark the city and the everyday experiences of its people. Yet they also convey the sense of something common running through their lives. The artist, the poet, the vegetable seller, the workers are all subjects of the Market. The movements and changes in the job market the consumer goods market the art market, define the lives of the people of the city.

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In this manner, through the medium of film, visual researchers attempt to analyse and convey the knowledge that we gather through observations and conversations with participants. Some researchers have used the visual medium as a way of collaborating with their participants. One way to do this is to make visuals with our participants.

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For example, *We Make Images* is the project, but I work in the visual records created by Share Sing and other members of his community. It is through this process of making the film together that I learned about the meaning of painting in the lives of the Bhils. In these works, the medium or device plays an integral role in the process and defines the knowledge that the researcher constructs.

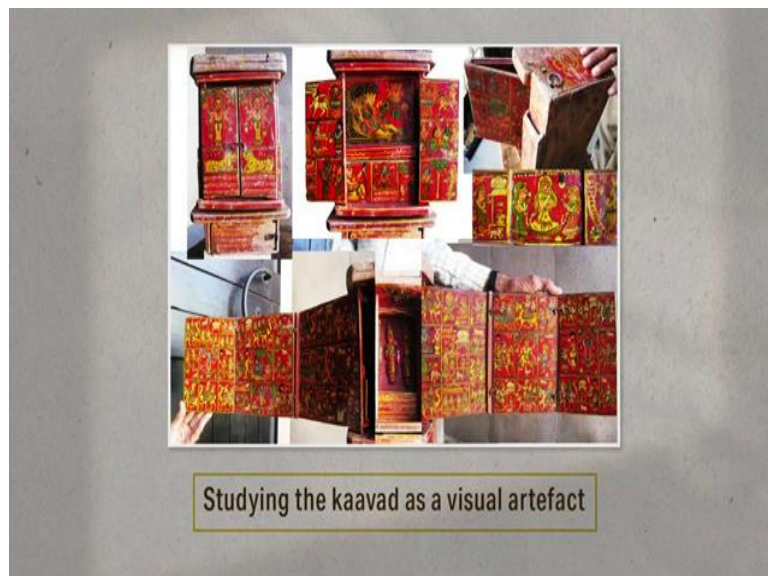
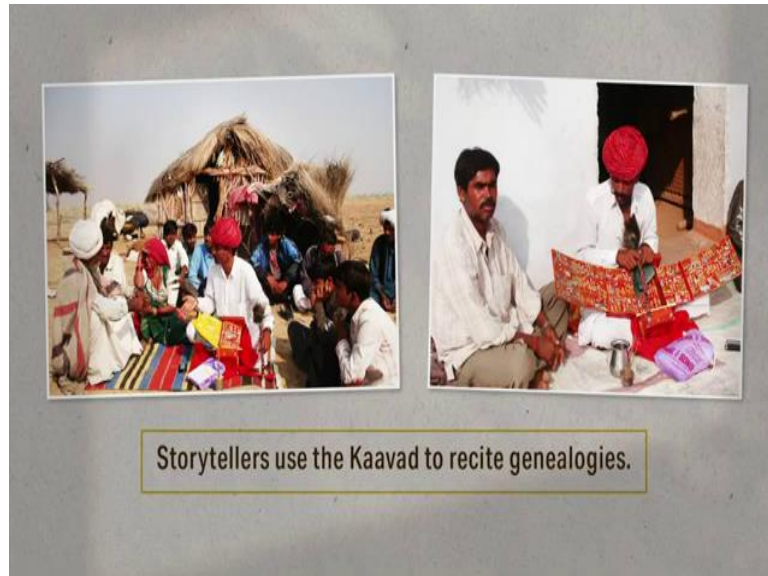
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As you can probably tell researching the visual and researching with the visual are not mutually exclusive paths. They often flow into each other. Much of the work that I have done is both researching the visual and researching with the visual.

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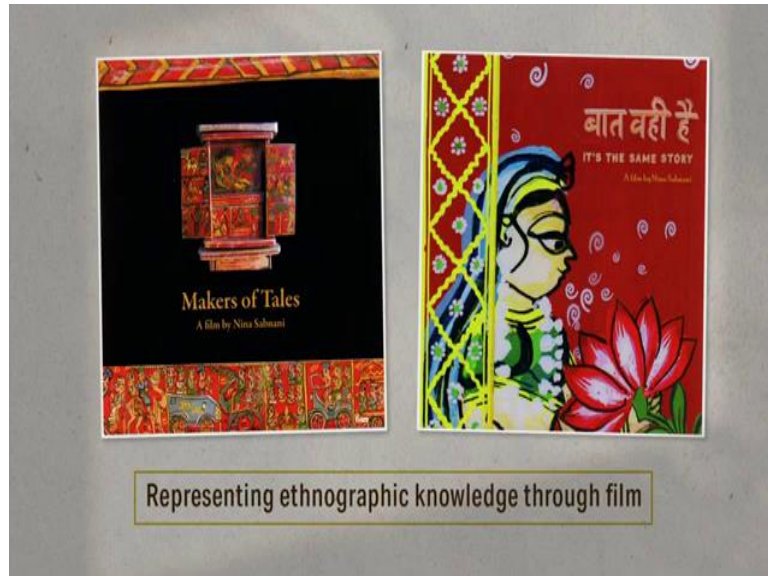




For example, in my work on the Kaavad tradition. I recorded visuals of one community making covers another using it for storytelling and I studied the Kaavad as a visual object the images and the stories painted on it its structure of many doors and so on.

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And finally, I represented my observations and interpretations in the form of two films.

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Let us look at another work which does both researching the visual and researching with the visual. This is a work based on visuals that are digital or filmmaker.



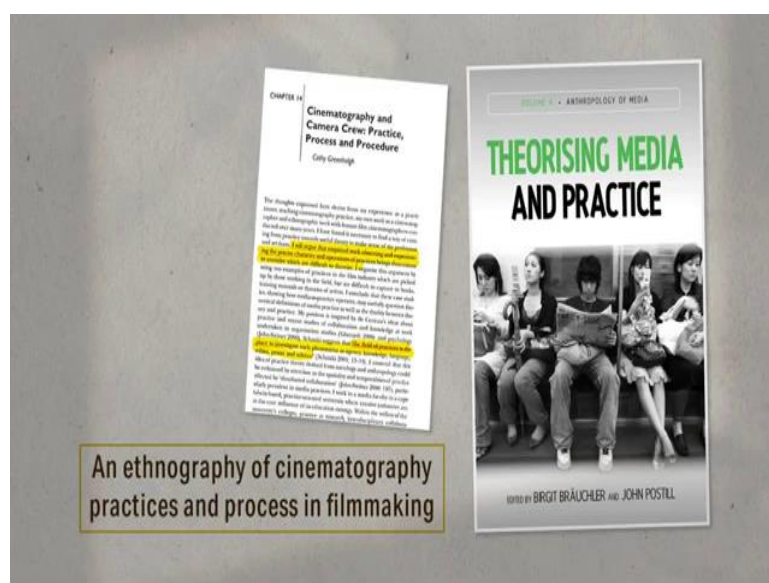
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Cathy Greenhalgh is a filmmaker and researcher from the UK who has used Ethnography to research the process and practice of cinematography in filmmaking. In one of our projects, she tried to explore how cinematographers and other members of a film crew perceive cinematography. She will be discussing this project with us.

Cathy Greenhalgh: hello I am going to talk about some research I did using ethnography working with ideas, which arose from teaching filmmaking making my own films and from long-term work with feature film cinematographers.

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Cinematography is essentially the process of manifesting camera movement compositional framing and lighting on a film carried out by the cinematographer or director of photography.

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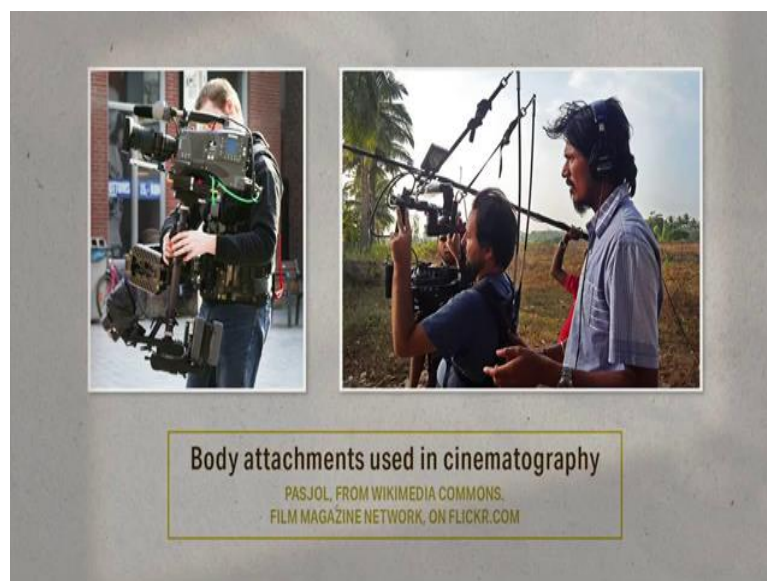
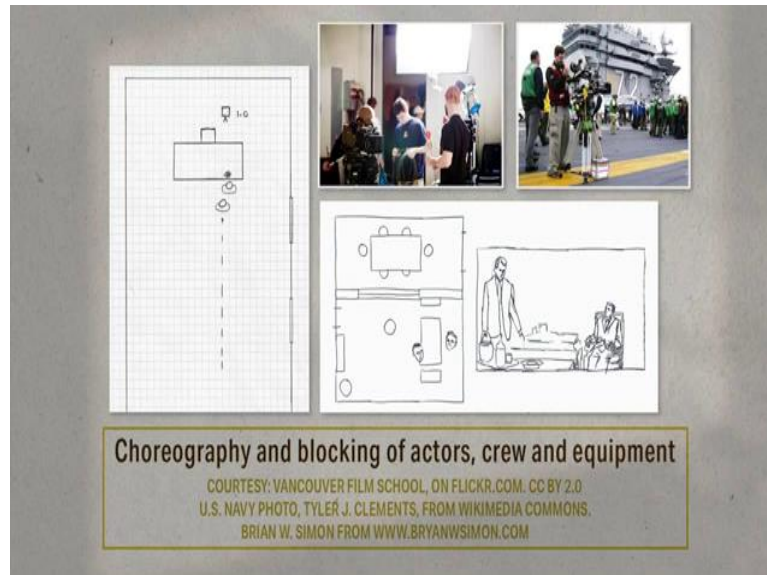
I tried to identify the differences in perception of cinematography as practice, process and procedure within the crew on a film. Originally, I began with the idea years back that cinematography is primarily a visual activity. I was making dance films and documentaries involving a lot of movement myself, and I was teaching how to make drama films with moving lighting working with actors and so on.

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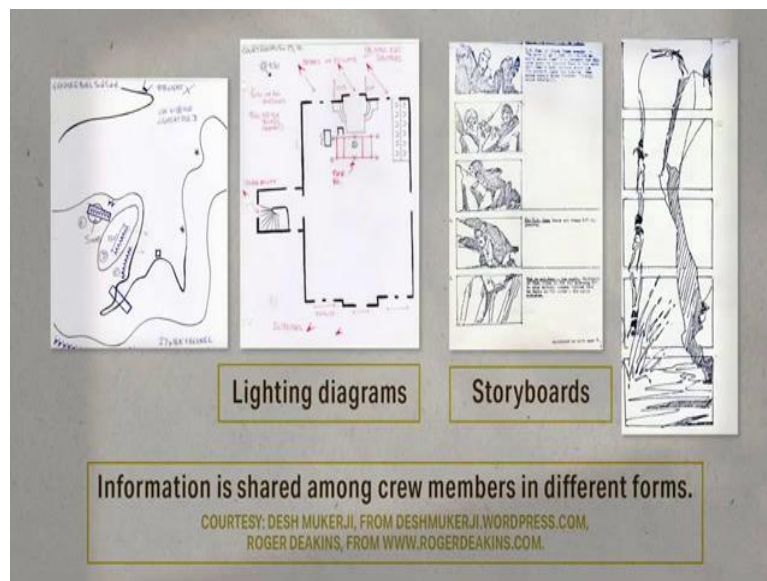
I became fascinated first with our seeing is not just a visual activity but is corporal and sensory.

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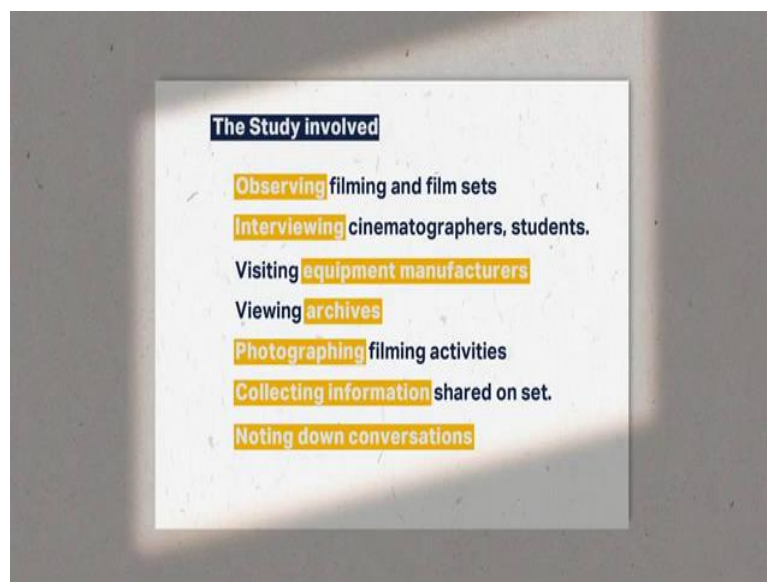
On a film the choreography or blocking of actors and equipment camera and lenses lights and dolly to move the camera or body attachments like Steadicam easy rig during making shots on a set is organised as both a hierarchical and collaborative creative activity is also distributed.

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Some of the knowledge is passed around as data or group information not just held by an individual. Work is both physical and tacit. It involves more explicit documentation and can be passed around as digital data.

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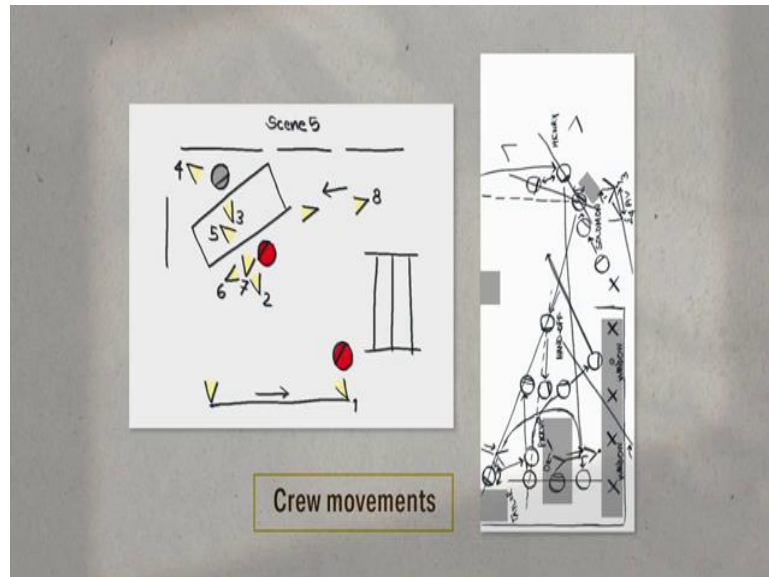


The ethnographic work involved observation on film sets interviews with cinematographers and my students studying cinematography visits to manufacturers of equipment, archive viewing, studying photographs of people on set, collecting documentation such as storyboards, mood boards, lighting diagrams, continuity sheets, lists of equipment,



instructions passed around the crew, taking notes of herd dialogue comparison of accounts excreta.

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They also drew maps of where people walked what times and spaces they move through and so on.

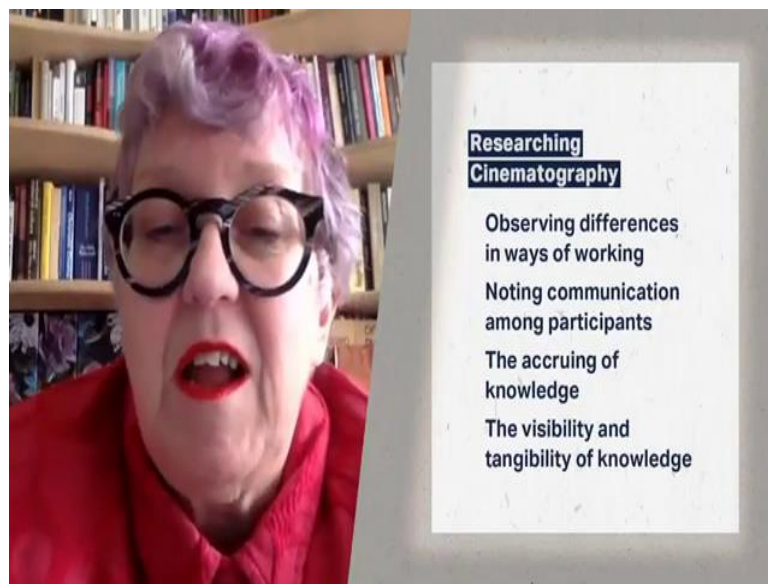
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First of all, I am an insider. I know about cinematography. Secondly, I asked in a way the most basic questions of the cinematographer what they do? And then I look at how they describe what they do.

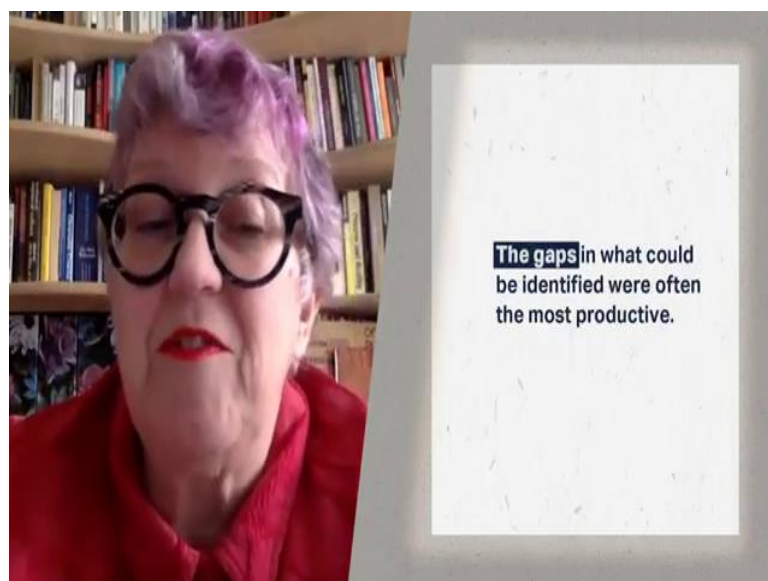


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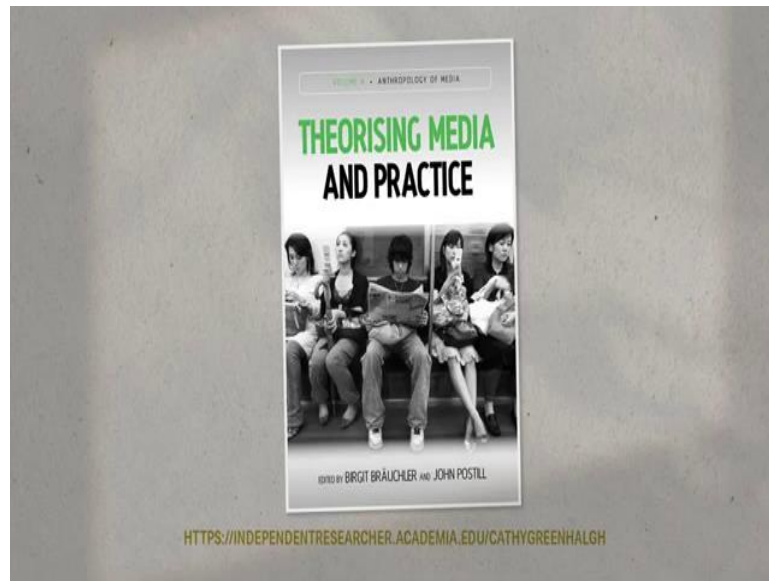
I noticed the small difference between departments, and how when communication happened, how knowledge accrued? I noticed how some of these things could be seen.

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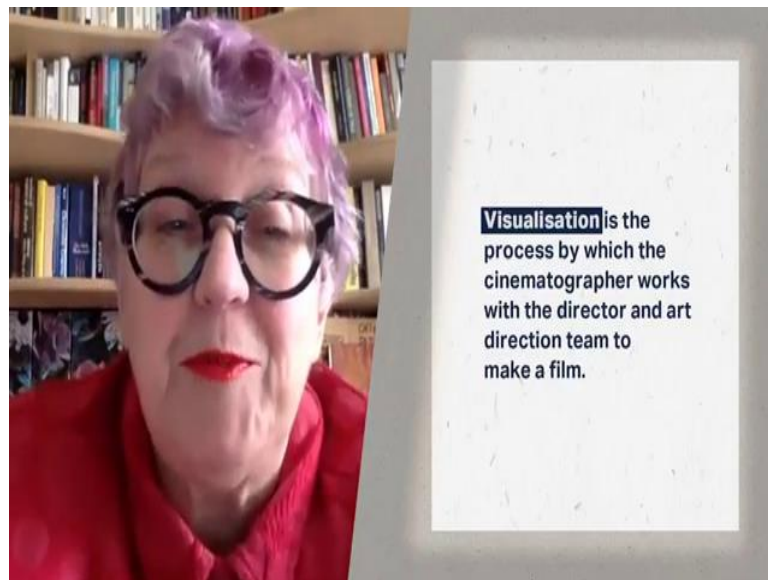
And the gaps in what could be identified what often the most productive.

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In the chapter cinematography and camera crew practice, process and procedure in the book, theorising media and practice, I describe this research in detail. I looked specifically at two areas for this chapter visualisation and cheating.

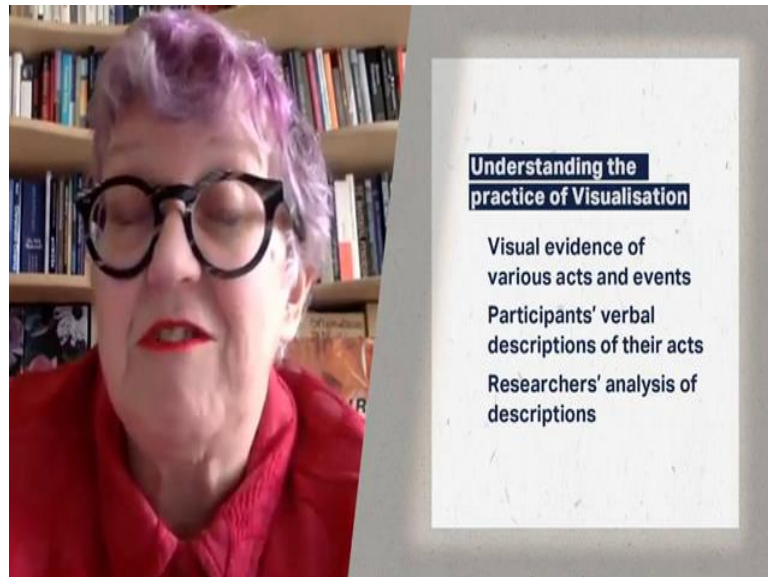
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The first is the process by which the cinematographer works with the director and production design or art direction team to make a film where the ideas come from what the visual influences are but more importantly how these were communicated. I noticed that aside from standard documents like storyboard, set lighting diagrams, notebooks and so on, there was a

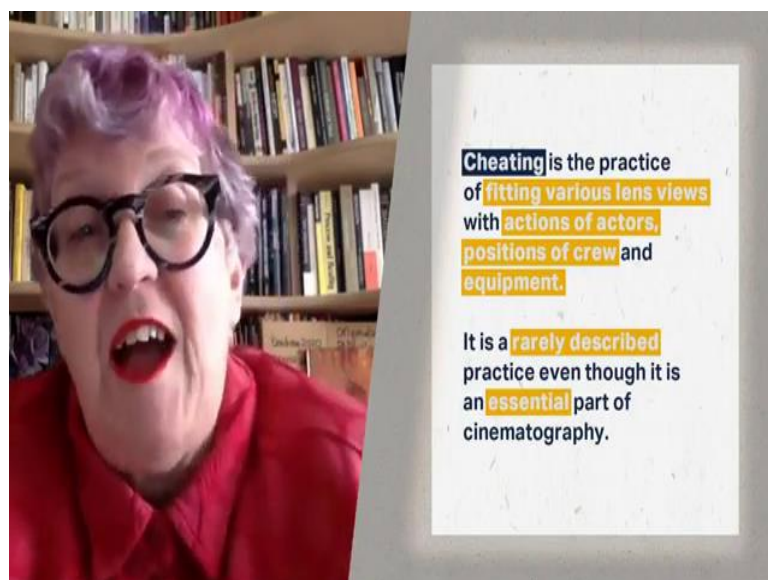
kind of professional rhetoric a way of talking about the colour palette, tonal range composition and temporal flow of lighting and so on.

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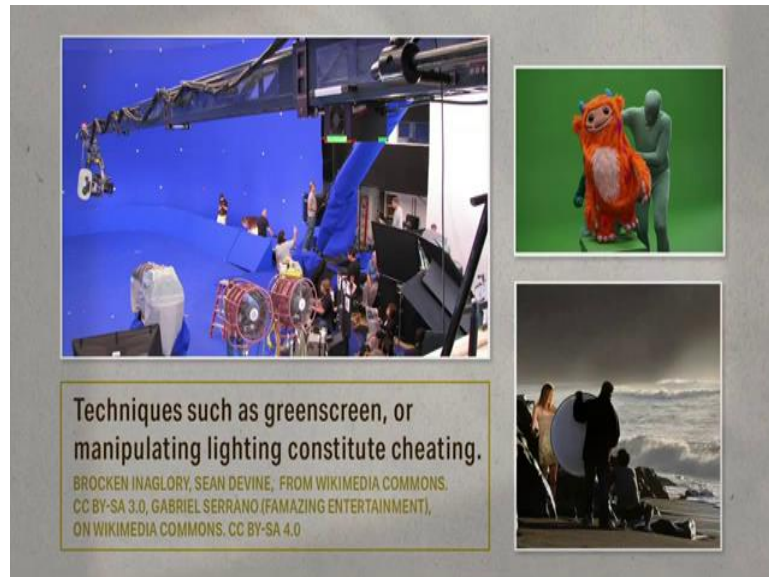
So, I needed both of Visual Evidence descriptions of the embodied choreographic event of making certain shots and reflexive accounts in interviews plus my own analysis of accounts by filmmakers and critics excreta.

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Cheating is the word generally used in parlance to describe fitting various lens views with the actions of actors and where the crew and equipment have to be.

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Often in odd geographic and choreographic positions which would be totally different on location or in the studio or in on an action film or an intimate love story, cheating cannot be known about without experiencing it.

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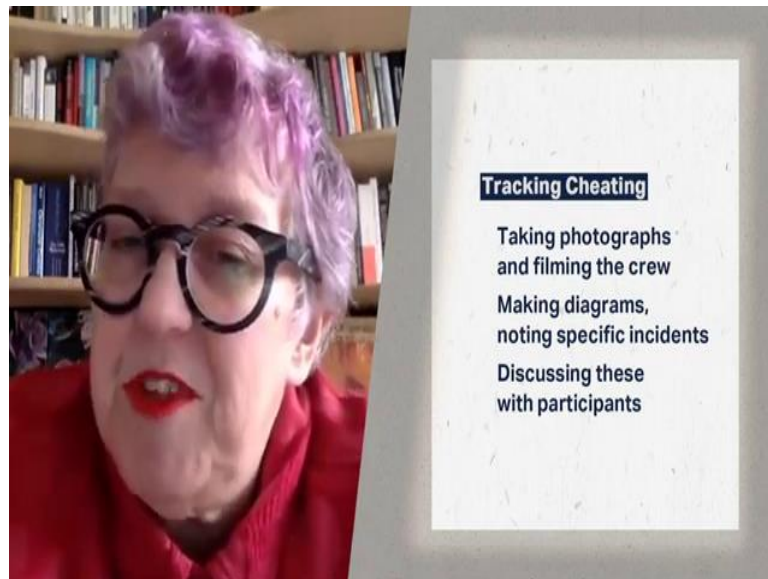


Imagine on your mobile phone how you have to move your body and fit the environment around your friends or yourself when you move between a selfie and a group selfie, for example. Now times this by 20 with many kinds of actor characters in different stories with



numerous kinds of dollies and lights. Cheating is rarely described in books properly yet it is an essential skill in cinematography and increases exponentially with more complicated films and said Logistics.

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I tried to track cheating by taking photographs and filming the crew, then drawing diagrams noting specific incidents and asking cinematographers and crew in subsequent interviewing.

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Ethnography, I finding evidence by observing from the ground up and finding the most appropriate means of displaying it visually and in writing was the helpful method here.



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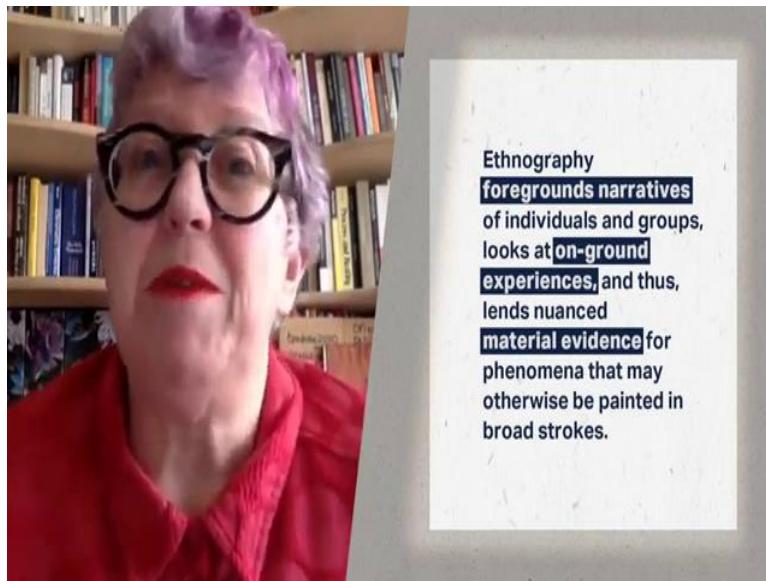
All those sensory ethnography things you are observing that cannot necessarily be written either written down or you might have to be recorded or found out about a different way. You have got to do everything. That's where sensory ethnography is really taken off because suddenly ethnographers realised that you know smell was so important or the visualisation of wearing a particular gold fabric was something was so important but not really communicated verbally between people.

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And what's also been happening with sensory ethnography and visual ethnography is more and more people have been looking at their own.

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So, like making, you know, an ethnographic film about people in Mumbai being Mumbaikar for example or me writing about people in the film industry from the same profession. I mean they might have made much bigger films than me, but I at least have an in with the way that I am talking to them.

In fact even what is happening in our world currently with the migration of people in the world climate change, especially these huge things ethnography is more important than ever because it brings local stories up to the universal rather than looking at systems policies and politics. It is a way of bringing stories from the front and getting a kind of material evidence from the ground. Thank you.

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Something up there are two major streams of visual ethnography in this searching the visual, we study the visuals that exist in the context and in researching with the visual we make visual representations of the context sometimes in collaboration with our participants. In either case, we search for meaning through the visual. In our next section, we will have detailed discussions on each of these streams.