Visual Ethnography and the Internet: Visuality, Virtuality and the Spatial Turn

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Visual Ethnography and the Internet: Visuality, Virtuality and the Spatial Turn

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Introduction

Both visual and virtual ethnography have their origins in the late 1990s, and became further established as we moved through the first decade of the 21st century. They are now firmly situated within a range of contemporary research techniques. However, even in the short number of years since these ethnographic practices began to be documented and critically reflected on there have been significant changes in the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of ethnographic practice and the ways it might be understood. Elisenda Ardévol (this volume) has highlighted that the Internet brings new challenges and opportunities to visual researchers, and these include those that invite us to develop new methodologies. In this chapter I respond to such an invitation by examining the implications of recent shifts towards phenomenological and multi-sensory approaches, and critical theories of place for the (re)conceptualisation of doing visual Internet ethnography.

In doing so I develop two themes: the question of how visual Internet ethnography might be conceptualised through a theory of place; and how the concept of multi-sensoriality might enable us to better understand visuality in Internet ethnography. I build on two examples of existing work: Christine Hine's (2000) *Virtual Ethnography*, and Tom Boellstorff's (2008) *Coming of Age in Second Life*, in which concepts of place and understandings of the visual have been mobilised to discuss Internet environments. Departing from these works, I then draw on a sensory ethnography approach (Pink, 2009) that is rooted in recent conceptualisations of place, movement and knowing in the work of Tim Ingold (2007, 2008), Mark Harris (2007) and Doreen Massey (2005). To demonstrate this, I discuss my experiences of extending my existing research about the visual culture of a Cittaslow (Slow City) town in the UK to engage with its increasing Internet presence. In what follows, I propose an advance in visual methodology through a paradigm for understanding visual Internet ethnography that is coherent with recent developments in sensory, phenomenological and spatial theory across the humanities and social sciences. Yet I also suggest that with the increasing proliferation of web-based practices amongst participants in research, in ways that are relevant to our research questions, we might rethink the status of doing visual ethnography on the Internet. The Internet is becoming not something we engage with by doing a special kind of online visual ethnography, but a part of the ‘ethnographic places’ (Pink, 2009) in which we become implicated as visual ethnographers.

The Emergence of the Visual and the Virtual in 21st-Century

Ethnographic Practice

Since the year 2000, there has been a dramatic increase in the methodological literature concerned with the visual and virtual aspects of ethnographic practice. Amongst the first contributions to this wave of publications was Christine Hine's (2000) *Virtual Ethnography*, published shortly before the first edition of my book, *Doing Visual Ethnography* (Pink, 2007 [2001]). Some reflections on these earlier moments provide an interesting starting point for considering the intellectual trajectories of these methodological developments and their contemporary implications.

In some ways Hine's (2000) and my own (Pink, 2007 [2001]) texts pursued different directions, since they explored rather contrasting contexts for ethnographic practice. Yet an analysis of their common heritage offers some interesting insights. Even though each book had its principal origin in a different discipline (Hine's in sociology and my own representing an interdisciplinary approach rooted in anthropology), both volumes ring clearly of a set of theoretical and methodological strands that emerged in the 1990s: like me, Hine was concerned with the ‘writing culture debate’ that continued to range into that period, through discussions of the authority of the ethnographer's authenticity and reflexivity as developed by Clifford and Marcus (1986). In fact I believe it was partly the new openness to doing, or at least writing about, ethnography in different ways, the invitations to subjectivity and the possibilities for experimentation that were created through those moments in the 1990s, that made it possible for formulations of ethnography as being *virtual* or *visual* to take a place amongst standard ethnographic methods. In the period that built up to these two publications, understandings of ethnographic practice, what it entailed and where it was done had been through a period of change inspired by the ‘writing culture’ debates (e.g. Clifford and Marcus, 1986, and see James et al., 1997). Indeed, during this period ethnography had also been recognised as being gendered (Bell et al., 1993); multi-sited (Marcus, 1995); intimate and sexual (Kulick and Willson, 1995); and embodied (Coffey, 1999). It comes as little surprise that it could also be virtual (Hine, 2000) and visual (Pink, 2007 [2001]) – or that I might also later understand it as sensory (Pink, 2006, 2009). These understandings also contributed to the emerging ideas of virtual and visual ethnography. Therefore, for instance, for Hine, the point that culture could be disassociated from places (e.g. Gupta and Ferguson, 1997), and that ethnography was no longer located in one locality but could be multi-sited (e.g. Marcus, 1995), was very compatible with the idea of doing ethnography online. As she puts it:

> … if culture and community are not self-evidently located in place, then neither is ethnography. The object of ethnographic enquiry can usefully be reshaped by concentrating on flow and connectivity rather than location and boundary as the organizing principle. (Hine, 2000: 64)

For the question of doing visual ethnography, the implications of working “with new technologies did not initially raise similar questions about place and locality. Visual ethnography was done in the same contexts as ‘ordinary’ ethnography. Thus the need to consider the role of new technologies in fieldwork took a different direction. In visual ethnography, the relationship between the technology and the embodied and gendered

self of the researcher came to the fore, as a means of reflexively understanding the processes through which ethnographic knowledge is produced (Pink, 2007 [2001]). However, now, 10 years later, both the spatial and phenomenological elements of fieldwork practice become particularly salient when discussing the idea of visual Internet ethnography. In the first part of this chapter, I contextualise my argument by outlining how spatial concepts and phenomenological approaches have been used in existing approaches to understanding the visual dimension of Internet ethnography. I then suggest how understanding visual Internet ethnography through phenomenological and spatial approaches invites new ways of appreciating the multi-sensoriality of visual Internet ethnography and its relationality to material realities.

A Critical Perspective on Virtual Places

Although Hine's (2000) *Virtual Ethnography* is firmly situated in the context of late 20th-century debates about ethnographic practice, it is simultaneously a particularly contemporary text in that she is concerned with notions of space, place, flow and movement. In this section I develop a critical discussion of existing uses of these concepts and the ways they have been related to visual images and experience in Internet ethnography in two texts. First, I outline Hine's development of the discussion about space, place and flows and how this relates to her discussion of visual images in a web 1.0 context. Then I turn to the contrasting example of Boellstorff's (2008) more recent monograph, where he has used concepts of place and the visual to frame his ethnography of a 3D web site.

Hine was concerned with the spatial terms upon which culture has been understood and with how in anthropology the idea of cultures being bounded had been deconstructed (Hine, 2000: 58). It is the latter of these debates that I am most interested in here. Following this strand in anthropological methodology, Hine's approach departs from what she refers to as ‘the tendency to treat the field site as a place which one goes to and dwells within’, which, as she puts it, ‘reinforces an idea of culture as something which exists in and is bounded by physical space’ (2000: 58). Her own approach for studying the Internet moves ‘away from holism and towards connectivity as an organizing principle’ (2000: 60). Following the ideas of Olwig and Hastrup (1997) and Marcus (1995), she outlines how: ‘Ethnographers might start from a particular place, but would be encouraged to follow connections which were made meaningful from that setting’ (2000: 60). And of particular relevance to the discussion here, Hine suggests: ‘The ethnographic sensitivity would focus on the ways in which particular places were made meaningful and visible’ (2000: 60).

To deal with this context, Hine harnesses Manuel Castells' (1996) notion of the ‘space of flows’ to understand online ethnography. As she describes it:

> In the space of flows, the emphasis is on connection rather than location. Flows of money, people, objects and communication travel around the world, and connectivity becomes the vital factor that structures inclusion. Much social experience is still tied to place, but the space of flows provides an alternative way of conducting social relations that is increasingly the site of the exercise of power by the elite. (Hine, 2000: 84–5)

Significantly, within this framework Hine cites Castells' point that ‘relations between place and flows are possible, but are “not predetermined” (Castells 1996a: 423)’ (Hine, 2000: 85). Thus, Hine suggests that: ‘As a way of connecting distant places, the Internet seems an ideal medium for the space of flows’ (2000: 85). She proposes that this raises specific questions for the ethnographer including: ‘How do people negotiate a path through [the] timeless time [of the “space of flows”] and the [chronological] time of place’ (2000: 85). I return to Hine's ideas below.

In his recent monograph, *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008), Tom Boellstorff takes a rather different approach to place. Although Boellstorff's work might be seen as primarily ethnographic, it is worth considering his theoretical and methodological approach. The differences with Hine's (2000) argument might in part be attributed to the point that his research, a decade later, was done on a rather different Internet to that inhabited by Hine, as he writes: ‘“a shift from the 2D web to the 3D web” is really the shift from network to place, or, more accurately, the addition of online places, since networks will continue to exist’ (Boellstorff, 2008: 91–2).

More specifically, though, it seems that in the eight years between Hine's (2000) and Boellstorff's (2008) monographs there have been shifts in the possible ways of both conceptualising and experiencing the Internet. In their respective contexts and projects, Hine and Boellstorff were able to inhabit and experience the Internet in different ways. They subsequently fit different theoretical perspectives to their ethnographies. As referenced above, Boellstorff suggests that networks still exist, but that there is now something more in that one is able to feel what he describes as ‘a sense of place’ (2008: 91) online. Indeed, Boellstorff claims that there are ‘online places’ (2008: 92) which I read to refer to being akin to the idea that there are online localities in that he writes:

> We all shared an understanding of a virtual world with land that could be bought and sold and built upon, proximity, area, residency, buildings, a community in the vicinity of a building, indeed a neighborhood, a neighborhood in which people live, into which they put effort so that it looks nice. (Boellstorff, 2008: 92)

In this sense, Boellstorff's rendition of places has in common with Hine's that they both claim something experiential. But, crucially for Boellstorff, there can be ‘places’ online precisely because, siding with existing ‘philosophical and empirical work, [that] however, has shown the salience of place and sensory experience online, including in virtual worlds,’ he argues that since ‘virtual worlds are places’ this means ‘they can be fieldsites: it makes an ethnographic approach conceivable’ (2008: 90). Boellstorff does not elaborate his theoretical commitments further in this direction. Yet the impression his discussion gives is that he is arguing that because we can have sensory experiences in/of online ‘worlds’ then they must be places, because sensoriality is a quality of place (2008: 91), as is sociality (2008: 92). This would seem to suggest that an online place is an online locality. Of particular interest for the question of the relationship between visual and virtual ethnography is that he goes on to discuss the sensoriality of online places specifically in terms of their visuality and in relation to concepts of landscape.

For Boellstorff, vision plays a central role in Second Life, especially during the historical period in which he

did his research (and given the fast-changing nature of web platforms it is appropriate to situate such recent change as historical in this context). He takes vision as the starting point for his discussion of place (2008: 92). In contrast to earlier forms of online engagement, he associates place with vision and landscape (2008: 92–3), proposing that:

> A broad cultural shift during the time of my fieldwork was that the notion of 'virtual world' increasingly presupposed three-dimensional visuality: a defining characteristic of a virtual world (versus a blog or website) was that it was a place in which you could look around. (2008: 92)

Therefore, for both Hine and Boellstorf, place is an important element of the experience of the Internet, and Boellstorf stresses the visuality of place. In what follows, I build on this by asking how we might rethink visual Internet ethnography through an alternative theory of place and multi-sensoriality. Boellstroff's rendering of networks and places does not make a firm distinction between ideas of locality, landscape, a sense of place and theoretical understandings of place. I have argued elsewhere (Pink, 2009, 2012), that if place is to be used as an analytical concept then a clear definition of it is required and that it should be used as distinct from locality. Thus, following my existing methodological work (Pink, 2009), I propose using place as a theoretical concept, whereby it is better understood as an abstract means of understanding configurations of things and the processes through which they are formed or change. Such a definition of place, which is drawn from the work of theorists such as Ingold (2007, 2008) and Massey (2005), conceptualises place as 'open' (Massey) and 'unbounded' (Ingold). However, if the term 'place' is used simultaneously to a bounded locality or to a visible landscape then there is potential for slippage between the different levels of analysis – from theory to lay concepts – which actually refer to quite different things and processes (Pink, 2012). Therefore, for the task of understanding how places and networks might be implicated in the doing of visual Internet ethnography a firm distinction should be made between the levels of ethnographic and theoretical analysis. This means distinguishing between, on the one hand, network theory in contrast to the feeling that one is part of a network in which one is connected to others; and on the other, between a theory of place in contrast to the sense of place that one might have in relation to a particular locality and the sensoriality and socialities associated with it. In the next section, I outline how a theory of place as open and unbounded enables us to understand the Internet as part of a multi-sensory environment where we might participate as visual ethnographers.

Place and the Internet

When understanding the use of the Internet we need to consider how such an activity is rooted both in the everyday materiality that we inhabit in our physical environments and what have come to be called virtual worlds. Of course these are in fact both part of one and the same world, but any discussion of them is haunted by the legacy of the notion that there was a virtual world that one could go to online that was part of a different reality. Qualitative Internet researchers have generally now accounted for this question (see Markham and Baym, 2009). Moreover, some media scholars have already begun to work with spatial theory to bring these domains together. For instance, Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy propose the concept of 'MediaSpace'.

This is ‘a dialectical concept, encompassing both the kinds of spaces created by media, and the effects that existing spatial arrangements have on media forms as they materialise in everyday life’ (2004: 2). To understand the practice of doing visual Internet ethnography, we need to both account for the relationality and continuities between digital and material elements of places and their visuality *and* account reflexively for how the ethnographer is situated at this interface.

In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Pink, 2009), I have conceptualised the ethnographic process through a theory of place. I suggest that researchers are always emplaced and moreover make ‘ethnographic places’ in the process of doing ethnography. Later, in *Situating Everyday Life* (Pink, 2012), I propose that contemporary Internet use, platforms, practices and their relationships to offline materialities, sensations and socialities can likewise be understood through a theory of place. Therefore, following this approach, ethnographers should not be seeking to find places online, or to determine that these are places by measuring them against certain sets of qualities and possibilities for visual experience that places are deemed to hold. Rather, the visual Internet ethnographer should attend to how the (audio)visuality of the material offline and digital online localities become interwoven in everyday and research narratives. To outline the theoretical foundations of these ideas I now reiterate arguments made in my existing publications with particular reference to the visual. For a fuller development readers should refer to Chapter 2 of *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (Pink, 2009) and Chapter 2 of *Situating Everyday Life* (Pink, 2012). The understanding that informs this approach is rooted in recent work seeing place as ‘open’ (Massey, 2005) and ‘unbounded’ (Ingold, 2008). While Massey and Ingold are opposed in some elements of their definitions of place and space, it is where they coincide that is most interesting for the framing I develop here. Theorists of place tend to be interested in the question of how sets of diverse things come together, become entangled and interwoven with each other, and in doing so become part of the creation of new (but always changing) configurations of things or ecologies. While they are not necessarily primarily interested in the visuality of place, it is possible to understand how processes involving visual practices, productions and representations are part of these configurations of place. In this way of thinking place becomes an abstract term for discussing what Massey calls ‘constellations of processes’ (2005) or what Ingold calls a ‘meshwork’ of lines (2008). The focus in these approaches is on relatedness, and this is developed in such a way that enables us to think of how things are interwoven or entangled with each other and the continuities this involves, rather than in thinking of how they are separate but connected. In this line of thinking the idea of relatedness is distinguished from the model of a network. As I have argued elsewhere (Pink, 2012), Massey's notion of place as ‘open to the externally relational’ (2005: 183) is particularly interesting for understanding environments where we are engaged in using online digital technologies. She argues for ‘an understanding of the world in terms of relationality, and world in which the local and global really are “mutually constituted”’. In this conceptualization, ‘The “lived reality of our everyday lives” is utterly dispersed, unlocalised, in its sources and in its repercussions. The degree of dispersion, the stretching, may vary dramatically between social groups, *but the point is that the geography will not be simply territorial*’ (Massey, 2005: 184; my italics). Following Massey's points we can understand place as based not in locality, not as simply the immediate visual landscape that we can sense when participating in a virtual reality platform, and not as a node of closely clustered pages in a network of electronic materials. Rather, it invites us to understand the Internet as a field of potential forms of relatedness. Direct relationships between

different elements of the Internet might not necessarily be activated. Yet they always have the potential to be interwoven into particular intensities of place that also involve persons, interactivity, material localities and technologies.

To take this discussion further, to understand how we experience and 'navigate' when doing visual Internet ethnography, in the next section I incorporate two further concepts – movement and multi-sensoriality – both of which also form the basis of other publications and arguments in this area (Pink, 2009;

Pink, 2012).

The Multi-Sensory Internet

The idea of multi-sensoriality proposes that our sensory experiences, rather than being separated out into the modern western categories of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, are part of a more complex system of human sensory perception in which they cannot necessarily be separated. As detailed elsewhere (e.g. Pink, 2009, 2011), these ideas emerge from both neurological studies and from the phenomenological approaches influenced by the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which are becoming increasingly influential in social, visual and sensory ethnography (e.g. Geurts, 2003; Grasseni, 2007; Ingold, 2000; MacDougall, 1998). This approach establishes that the modern western sensory categories cited above are culturally constructed. They are as such the categories that we, as researchers participating in what scholarship has become in modernity, use to research and represent sensory experience. Importantly, as Ingold demonstrates, this means that we should not consider vision as *the* dominant sense in any essential way, but rather it is the category of vision that has been understood as dominating in modern western culture (Ingold, 2000). The implication for the visual Internet ethnographer is that we need to understand the visuality of web-based phenomena and the ways we look at them – what Grasseni (2007) calls our 'skilled vision' – in terms of their interrelationships with other dimensions of sensory experience.

When we use desktop monitors, laptops and mobile devices to access the Internet, we are always participating in a multi-sensory environment. Our visual practices are inevitably part of this, in that they are implicated in the way we experience and navigate the screen, touch-pad, keyboard, and the physical localities we participate in. Indeed, the idea of the visual Internet ethnographer as someone who sits at a desk gazing into a monitor is becoming increasingly redundant in a world where the Internet is so often accessed through mobile devices and in contexts of changing social and material composition. In this sense, the web pages, platforms and other applications ethnographers might engage with online are not simply bounded visual landscapes that can be sensed as virtual places. Rather, they are experienced inevitably as part of places that straddle the different environments we engage in and perceive multi-sensorially and memorially. Therefore, I understand places in visual Internet ethnography as constituted by intensities of flows that converge, become interwoven or entangled, and in which the visual ethnographer her- or himself becomes implicated. In a visual ethnography, particular attention will be paid to the images and visual practices that form part of these places. Yet this must be qualified by situating the visual as part of multi-sensory experience in screen-related

ethnography.

There are important experiential (and practical) differences between navigating from one visual/textual page to another in a web 1.0 environment, moving in the visual landscapes of a web 2.0 virtual world, and engaging with digital texts as discussed below. Yet the idea that we are moving *through* the Internet rather than moving *from* one connected locality *to* another offers us the opportunity to understand the ethnographer's attentive engagement with the social, material and visual/sensory dimensions of the environment she or he experiences in alternative ways. Many web elements are inter-platform (often audio-visually) interdependent with what is happening offline, and interlinked with others in ways that are better thought of as relational than as simply connected to each other. Navigating this relationality itself should, I propose, be seen as a multi-sensory experience.

The visuality of the Internet can therefore be experienced in different ways. This varies between the kinds on online activity and engagements described respectively by Hine and Boellstorff and the web 2.0 contexts I discuss below. Visual experience of the Internet might be understood as part of the multi-sensory process of moving through and learning as one moves digitally in ways that are inextricable from the material world and its own visuality. By the latter I refer not simply to the immediate physical environment that the Internet user is part of, but also, as in the cases discussed below, the physical localities and persons that Internet content represents, and the ways the body is engaged in imagining and remembering them. Understanding the visuality of the Internet this way enables us to move beyond the notion of ‘looking at’ images on a screen, to conceptualise our emplaced experience as one of moving through a digital environment while rooted in the materiality of our immediate circumstances and engaging embodied memories and imaginations of past and possible future experiences.

The Visual Ethnographer Goes Online

I now draw on my research about the Cittaslow (Slow City) movement in the UK. I explore the implications of the methodological approach outlined above for understanding what happens when both the visual practices of research participants and the research of the visual ethnographer shift to the Internet. I have deliberately chosen to examine an example in which the online component of the research develops as a continuation of face-to-face and other mediated encounters, in order to provide a contrast to approaches that understand online ethnography as something that takes the Internet as its starting point. Between 2005 and 2007 I did ethnographic research about the Cittaslow movement, focusing on its development in the UK, along a range of themes connecting with well-being, sustainability, the senses and consumption. My visual and sensory ethnography research methodologies are discussed elsewhere (e.g. Pink, 2007, 2009); they involved eating with people, walking video tours, interviews, photography, and the analysis of the existing visual culture of the towns I was researching. At the time, Cittaslow had an Internet presence: UK and International websites, as well as other national websites. However, by 2010, its web presence had grown, along with web 2.0, and I began to ask myself how this could be understood in relation to changing digital technologies and the

development of the movement. As part of this next stage of the research process I undertook an analysis of the Cittaslow International web presence, encompassing its Facebook activity, YouTube channel, blog and website (Pink, 2012). The analysis was framed by the theoretical principles of place outlined above, and attended to how a digital Cittaslow could be understood in relation to activist practices. In this study I was able to understand Cittaslow's web 2.0 presence as part of a place that incorporated localities but was not essentially based in a bounded geographical unit.

The next stage of my research turned to the question of how the Cittaslow activists of towns where I had done fieldwork during 2005–2007 were now using the Internet as *part of* their self-production as Cittaslow members. As I noted above, as part of my earlier fieldwork I had focused on how these towns used photography, video and other media as ways of representing and indeed constituting themselves as Cittaslow (Pink, 2008, 2011, 2012). To investigate this question anew in an online visual ethnography, I began to explore how the Internet is being engaged in similar ways. My focus is on Diss, a town in South Norfolk, UK. The town and its Cittaslow identity already had an Internet presence during my earlier research, and this has continued to develop. Below I discuss how I encountered two online visual representations, which I suggest form part of the visual ethnographic field – or 'ethnographic place' – in which I am researching. Moreover, both have strong continuities with the earlier visual research I undertook in the town. The first is a digital map that represents a Cittaslow walk around the town, and the second a locally made video documentary that was used to represent the town at a Cittaslow International Conference. These are very different Internet contexts to those described by Hine (2000) and Boellstorff (2008). Yet, as I will argue, the framing of visual Internet ethnography and its relationship to physical environments through a theory of place is equally relevant whether it refers to ethnography done in a virtual reality site or if it is practised at the interface between online and offline experiences as is the case for this example.

To consider how Cittaslow in Diss was produced audiovisually, I returned to an earlier article where I examined 'how routes and mobilities are represented in local visual culture' through a focus on photography, documentary film and video in Diss, one of the Cittaslow towns (Pink, 2008). This town has an interesting history of visual representation. It is featured in a (now) historical television film, *Something About Diss* (1964), which involves a tour of the town by its director, the Poet Laureate John Betjeman. Routes around the town have also been represented photographically by a local group campaigning about disabled-access issues, as well as pictorially in local maps and illustrated walking guides around the town. Therefore the town already had a rich local visual culture, much of which seemed to involve the making of routes around or touring the town.

The Snail Trail

Drawing on this local visual culture, as well as my own existing visual ethnographies that have used walking and touring methods (Pink, 2004, 2007), during the fieldwork period in Diss I took a series of established walks around the town, including a video walk led by the local historian, Bas. I viewed existing (audio)visual

photographic and video texts produced by research participants and in one case including a historical documentary film, which took as their narratives mobile routes through the town. I ended an article in which I discussed these routes and walks in relation to each other (2008) noting how by then, the new tour of the town that I discuss here was being produced:

> In the summer of 2007, once the Cittaslow Centre was opened, Cynthia (the Cittaslow Co-ordinator) told me that as part of their activities a group of Cittaslow leaders, in collaboration "with an agency they had commissioned, was designing a new route through the town that tourists and locals alike would be able to follow. This was being tentatively called the 'Snail Trail' and would be a Cittaslow tour of the town. It would possibly incorporate local-produce eating places, areas of historical interest, and other things of Cittaslow value. Thus a Cittaslow tour of the town, similar to that I had envisaged as a research exercise [but that I did not have the opportunity to create], was to be created by the Cittaslow committee members as something that would be meaningful and useful to *them.* (Pink, 2008: 27)

The Diss Snail Trail was, at the time of writing this chapter, available online as an interactive map (http://www.farrowsweb.com/diss/snailtrail.php) as part of the Cittaslow Diss website. Such digital presence starts to give new meanings to the idea of participant-produced media in visual ethnography. Whereas the predominant method in the past has been to *invite* participants to produce materials, in this case there was an interesting convergence between visual ethnography and local visual practices. The map could be downloaded and printed, and also be used online. As it said on the website, 'The Snail Trail is unique in that it incorporates wildlife, history, shops and restaurants.' By clicking on the appropriate textual link the viewer was taken across the hand-drawn map to the spot where the particular element of the town selected was indicated. Below the map appeared written information about the particular item. In this sense, the online map served as a straightforward guide to what was visualised on it and what one might find if walking the route that it proposed. Maps are flat, yet the interactive map took one deeper than the surface of the map because it linked each point with a written description. It highlighted local food and crafts (markets, shops and cafes), local history (the museum), the local landscape and materiality (the Mere, the Cathedral and Mount Street), as well as independent traders. All of these are very relevant to the local sustainability agenda of Cittaslow and they moreover invite sensory experiences of the town that reinforce the Cittaslow principles. While the map looked at the town from above, the Snail Trail should be appreciated from within; and because it involved a walk around the town, which engaged, for example, with its locally sourced food, its views, its surfaces underfoot and the sociality of its markets and independent trading shops, it invited its users to a multi-sensory experience of the town.

There are some resonances between the digital Snail Trail map and the project of community mapping discussed by Grasseni in Chapter 6, and by Lapenta in Chapter 8 (although the types of digital map discussed in each chapter are rather different). As I pointed out in my earlier article (2008), this digital (and printable) map emerged from local practices rather than a research exercise. The Snail Trail was designed by a committee of local people and based on established local narrative and embodied knowledge. In this sense,

it engaged the viewer and potential walker with a series of sites that recur in the routes and tours I discussed in my 2008 article, for example, the Mere (the town's rather unusual historic lake) and the Corn Hall. Yet it also engaged the International Cittaslow discourse that both argues for, and, to some extent, frames the local uniqueness the map promoted. This indeed is reflected in the representation of the Mere and the Corn Hall but also in the farmers' market and food places it includes. In achieving this, the map invited online users to engage with the town through a series of images and texts. If actually in the town, it invited people to experience the town's physical environment, through a certain narrative. The narrative it followed also had a commitment to generating a specific set of sensory experiences, or sensory ‘pleasures’, that were *part of* the agenda of Cittaslow and at the same time specific to the embodied experience of the town as a physical locality and to local discourses on its history and features that precede Cittaslow.

From the above discussion, it is easy to start to understand how as a visual Internet representation, the Snail Trail Map was in fact part of a place that can be seen to traverse online and offline worlds. It brought together locality as it is experienced and locality as it is digitally mediated. It also intertwined the local and the global as it combined the town's historical narratives and local produce with the discourses of Cittaslow. The extension of the town's visual self-representation onto the Internet invited the visual ethnographer to also extend what I have elsewhere called the ‘ethnographic place’ to encompass this Internet context. Yet, as I have suggested, to engage with the Internet map I needed to also draw on my own sensory embodied experience of being in the town, and on ‘old’ media representations of the town that I had previously analysed. Visual Internet ethnography itself involves engaging with the ecologies of media and historical layers of representations that are inextricable from the online presence that one is attending to.

Diss – A Cittaslow Town: A Youtube Video Representation

When seeking to continue my Cittaslow fieldwork online I encountered a new video – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HtMbHzGbXig. As I noted above, participant-produced videos that represented the issues I was concerned with had already existed prior to my fieldwork in Diss. Extending my ethnographic research to the Internet added a new dimension. While conventionally visual ethnographers have asked or invited participants to produce videos about their own lives, experiences or localities, I found that materials were now being produced and posted online. This in itself presents an interesting shift in the way that we might conceptualise the visuality of ethnographic places, in that they are increasingly becoming contexts where the processes, practices, socialities and representations that constitute them also interwine online and offline contexts. Thus, for the visual Internet ethnographer, the visuality of place is not necessarily concerned only with the idea of experiencing a visual landscape while interacting online. Rather, it is concerned with the very relationality of the visuality of Internet representations, other visual media and the way that vision is part of the multi-sensory and embodied experience of being part of a material locality. This suggests that the experience of place, as it is constituted through the interweaving of online and offline experiences and components, is likewise multi-sensory.

Visual Internet ethnography can involve using a range of web platforms. It also means moving not only through different parts of the Internet, but between written and audio/visual texts too. In addition it is illustrative of how, although it is not as 'new' as social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, email plays an important role in the interpersonal communications of digital ethnography. I emailed Tony Palmer, an ex-Mayor and ex-Cittaslow Chairman in Diss, who is still on the Cittaslow committee, to ask about the origins of the Cittaslow video. Tony, who I had already met several times as part of my research in the town, emailed back to tell me that the video was made for him and his colleague Jane Trippet-Jones, who has taken over as the Chair of the committee to take to the International Cittaslow Conference in Korea. I moved again to a different type of file, to read the online report on their trip, which can be accessed through its link (http://www.disscouncil.com/cittaslow.php). In the report, Jane Trippet-Jones describes how:

> On the first day we gave our presentation which was a fantastic opportunity to promote Diss in front of an international audience. It is always daunting standing up in front of people and this was no exception especially as the stage was very large! Tony introduced me as the 'new' face of Cittaslow Diss before I continued with the presentation, which was based on a film that had been made for us by Toby Foster, a Diss 6th former.

Thus I followed further the town's Cittaslow progress online. Yet this was not detached from the fieldwork I had done in the town. Like the Snail Trail map, the video resonates in a number of ways with existing documentaries and walking tours of the town. It represents, for example, the Mere, the auction rooms, the markets and the independent shops along with familiar routes I had traversed on foot. Encountering the video online and following up its status allowed me to understand how it had represented both the town's local knowledge narratives and the Cittaslow movement's values back to the wider members of the movement at its international conference. It thus feeds into my wider research agenda that seeks to understand how Cittaslow towns constitute themselves as Cittaslow places, and the role of visual and digital media in these processes (Pink, 2011).

Taking these points back to the theoretical approach I outlined above, referring to place, the senses and movement, there is an essential point to be made. The examples of the Cittaslow Diss Snail Trail and video show how in doing visual ethnography online, we do not need to necessarily seek out research topics and questions that are specifically about new types of social media or novel cultural configurations such as virtual reality worlds. Rather, the move of visual ethnography onto the Internet will more often than not be part of the ways in which the sorts of areas we were already working on begin themselves to engage with the visuality of the Internet in new ways. As Ardévol (this volume) shows, in some cases this can invite the production of new methods. Yet, it often, as for the two examples discussed here, means following the visual and textual practices of research participants as they go on the Internet. My point is that doing Internet ethnography does not have to mean inventing new visual methods. It *does* nevertheless involve working with a methodological approach that can encompass visualities, visions and ways of looking that are both online and offline. As I have argued, a theory of place and attention to multi-sensoriality offer a route to such an analysis.

Conclusion

The existing Internet ethnography literature has engaged with notions of place and visuality. In this chapter I have argued however that its rendering of these concepts is limited. Instead I have suggested framing our understanding of visual Internet ethnography through theories of place, movement and multi-sensoriality. Based on this argument, I propose a set of methodological principles for doing visual Internet ethnography:

The relationship between offline and online visual ethnography practices is integral to how ethnographers encounter the intensities of interrelated things and processes that become ethnographic places.

Different digital (visual) and mobile technologies have a range of roles to play in these practices, and in creating relations between online and offline materialities, visualities and research practices.

The visuality of the Internet is experienced at an interface between everyday materialities, the technologies through which we access the Internet and the place of the visual in the multi-sensory experience of the screen.

Our experience of the Internet is multi-sensory; therefore vision, visual experience and images should be situated as part of the multi-sensoriality of human experience – not simply as representing the dominant sense.

A theory of place enables us to abstract both the subject matter and the process of doing visual Internet ethnography. It allows us to understand what we are researching as a constantly shifting configuration – or ecology of things – that encompasses web-based and material/local contexts. It moreover enables us to understand the practice of doing (visual) ethnography as one that creates 'ethnographic places' by bringing together things and processes analytically.

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