

SEEING PATTERNS ON THE GROUND: REFLECTIONS ON FIELD-BASED PHOTOGRAPHY

Jan van Duppen

Abstract

This paper reflects on field-based photography practices that are informed by the 'shooting script' approach and its potential for social science and design researchers to analyse urban spaces. By discussing an ethnographic study of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners in London, it examines the shooting script in conjunction with grounded theory as a way of structuring the use of photography in fieldwork and analysis. The paper critiques the methodological underpinnings of the shooting script and reframes it as a performed embodied practice of documentation, interpretation and translation. Following on, it suggests finding ways to include self-reflections in publications. Dispersed throughout the paper, images and captions provide an insight into the research process and they evidence the potential of this visual methodology – when triangulated with participant observation and interviews – for analysing the distinctive patterning on the ground produced by gardeners and drawing out the ambiguities involved in their spatial boundary-making practices. Furthermore, the paper discusses the implications of moving from analogue to digital photography in fieldwork, and how the navigations between virtual and material technologies consulted during analysis co-constitute research outcomes. It continues by arguing that the notion of a 'script' might be too rigidly interpreted and proposes instead to nurture openness towards the accidental and contingent in fieldwork and analysis.

Keywords: photography; fieldwork; methodology; shooting script; boundaries; allotment, community and guerrilla gardens

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Biographical note

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Introduction

Although photography has become such a ubiquitous part of our lives, the use of the camera in fieldwork sometimes remains unquestioned and academic papers do not always discuss the ways in which images made by researchers play a role in their analysis. The sociologist Charles S. Suchar observed in 1997 that studies often approach field-based photography in ways that are ‘casual, informal, or intuitively-based’ (Suchar, 1997, p.53). Whilst the introduction of digital cameras and smart phones has dramatically increased access to and use of photography since then, reflexive and structured ways of working with images made during fieldwork remain a rare thing to encounter in the social sciences. In this text, I work critically with the visual method ‘shooting script’, which was introduced by Suchar as a way of combining the strengths of documentary photography and grounded theory, the latter being a specific methodology that develops theory from qualitative data analysis.

My research into allotment, community and guerrilla gardens as spaces of play and work functions as a vehicle to discuss the potentials and limitations of this particular visual approach. The shooting scripts helped me to see patterns on the ground, and to get a better understanding of the gardeners’ boundary-making practices. By reflecting upon this particular visual methodology and my research process, I aim to speak to this special issue’s concern with abutments and confluences between the disciplines of art history and design. Photography as a visual medium may be associated with the fine arts, but I discuss it here as a research tool for design, geography and sociology to analyse the social and spatial qualities of cities. I understand photography in this text as an embodied performed research practice, and by attempting to unravel some of the complexities involved in the doings of photography in research, I contribute to this special issue’s debate on processes and ways of making across design and art history.

Sociological seeing

Taking photographs can be part of various research methods for social scientists, and the images made in research encounters can do different sorts of work in producing knowledge. Cultural geographer Gillian Rose has written extensively on visual research methods and her book *Visual Methodologies* (Rose, 2016) is a key reference for scholars in the social sciences. In her discussion on making photographs as part of a research project, Rose suggests that photo-essays may aim to be more analytical or evocative or both, and she recommends that researchers carefully think through the relations between photographs and text. In terms of analytic uses of photo-documentation, Rose foregrounds Suchar’s shooting script approach as a systematic way to take photographs in order to provide data for analysis, and highlights its potential for the study of relations between social processes and their visual appearances (Rose, 2016, pp.310–14).

To situate Suchar’s shooting script approach further, sociologists Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman argue in their edited volume *Picturing the Social Landscape* that Suchar’s photographic inventory of gentrification in Amsterdam and Chicago in that same volume (Suchar 2004) offers ‘a visual survey and documentation of macro-processes that display the texture of urban social transformation’ (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004, p.11). Hence, the shooting scripts’ potential, as pointed out by Rose, Knowles and Sweetman, to work with images to systematically analyse urban social transformations made it a relevant research tool for my study into the boundary-making practices of urban gardeners. In this paper, then, the series of images of the physical manifestations of allotment, community and guerrilla garden boundaries in conjunction with their captions form an analytical photo-essay that helps the researcher to see patterns on the ground.

As in every research project the formulation and reworking of key research questions are central to a rigorous research process and Suchar links this explicitly to the practice of photography as part of a research project. The ‘shooting script’ contains a set of research questions – informed by a theoretical discussion – that shapes and guides the photography in the field; in my research this is related to looking at the boundaries of urban gardens. The shooting script outlines what the researcher is interested in and how s/he is going to document and analyse the visual data. Suchar argues that shooting scripts work as ‘guides for photographic and sociological seeing’ (1997, p.35). This method advises that the researcher first reads relevant literatures, thinks about possible research themes, and

writes down the kind of images he/she is collecting and how these might contribute to the conceptual discussion. Guided by this initial shooting script based on 'hunches and theories' the researcher then goes into the field to make photos. Once the first sets of images are made and developed, the researcher sits down and goes through the contact sheets, looking at the images, annotating their meaning for the research questions (logging procedure) and, through the open coding process, identifies themes that enable better understanding of the phenomena under scrutiny. Open coding refers to the initial phase of attaching labels, for example 'codes', to passages of text or particular photos to make sense of the data collected so far and to draw relations to the conceptual framework.

The dynamic and iterative research process that Suchar outlines is informed by 'Grounded Theory', an approach from sociology that aims to build theory from data, which involves a similar cycle of theoretical discussions, data collection, open coding, focused coding, and memo writing. It was introduced by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and further developed by Strauss and Juliet Corbin in *Basics of Qualitative Research* (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Instead of developing a refined understanding of symbolic interactions through text, Suchar applies this methodology to images. Throughout the process questions are reformulated, and research sites are revisited for additional photo series (see Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2). Following the open coding, Suchar suggests

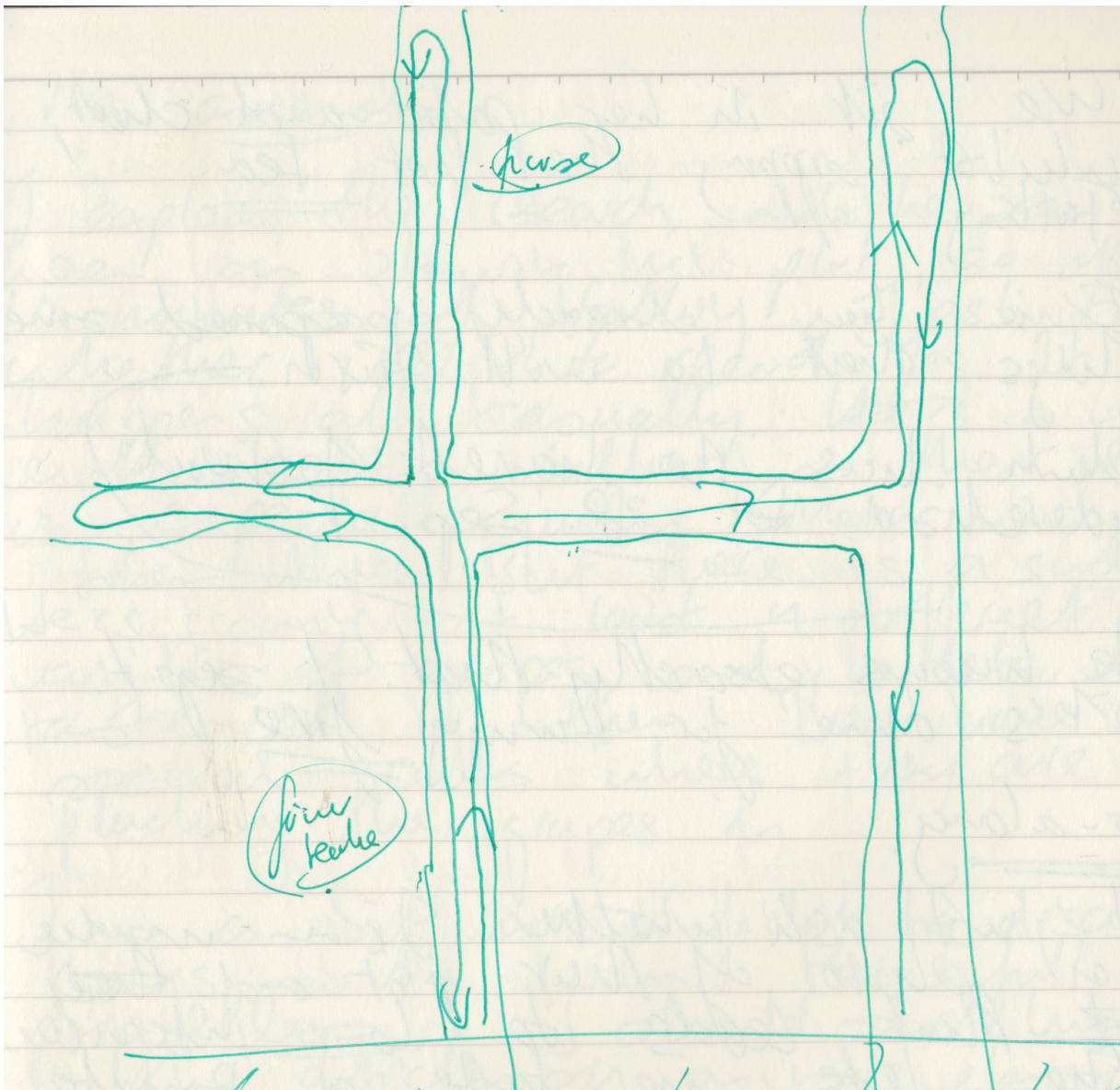


Figure 6.1: Extract from notebook – 'I walked like this...', 2014, paper. (Image credit: Jan van Duppen). Next to this quickly drawn map from the allotment site, I wrote in my fieldnotes: "I've tried to do the shooting script today. I especially put a different lens on last night, so that I would be able to capture more [of the allotment plot] on the image, as it is a wide-angle lens. I need less distance to the 'object'. It's a different experience photographing every third border between the plots. Seeing the rich diversity. I walked like this: ..." This short extract and map illustrate the iterative process of formulating the shooting script, revisiting the fieldwork site, and the choice for particular technologies that might help best to address the research question. This walk resulted in a photo-series of 77 images like the three displayed in Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.2 a–c: *Photo-series Allotment Plot Boundaries, 2014, digital image.* (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This is a selection of three images from a photo-series consisting of 77 images of allotment plot boundaries. Following an initial shooting script at the allotment site, I took a photo of every third plot I passed by whilst walking past all the allotment plots at the site (see map Figure 6.1). I stood on the main path and focused the camera on the right-hand side of the plot. I thereby also captured the neighbouring plot, the path in between the plots and how the border of the main plot runs down to the end. Each single image shows the ‘front’ and ‘side’ of the plot. This produced a series of images that reveal the great diversity of how allotment gardeners mark the borders of their plots. The top image shows how an allotment holder used HERAS fencing to demarcate the boundary of a plot, whilst also repurposing the fence into a structure supporting the growth of their crops. The middle image shows the use of wooden frames for creating a border, and on the right side a container is created out of pallets which holds together a compost heap. On top of the compost, pumpkins can be seen that will be submitted to the allotment community pumpkin growing competition. The bottom image depicts a plot holder that chooses not to make use of any sort of fencing between plots; next to the water basin they created a small DIY structure out of pallets and an old door that holds together a compost heap.





Figure 6.3: Focused coding on contact sheet, 2015, paper, A4. (Image credit: Jan van Duppen).

This A4 sheet provides a snapshot of the focused coding process. From top to bottom, the case studies are allotment, community and guerrilla gardens. This contact sheet has been put together after an initial open coding process, and it helped to detect patterns within case studies and compare across the three gardening practices. The handwritten annotations discuss the different material cultures that can be read from the images, as well as adding information from interviews and participant observation on the spatial negotiations captured in the images.

a phase of focused coding, which involves making connections between the earlier identified categories (see Figure 6.3).

Sociological seeing, according to Suchar, is not solely a visual notion, not something one can just comprehend by perception, but rather an iterative, structured research process that involves an ongoing interaction with the data generated and theories consulted. He urges researchers not to consider it as a 'latent quality', as it requires a 'rigorous application of methodology and the systematic interaction of the analyst with the data' (Suchar, 1997, p.35). Figures 6.1 to 6.3 provide snapshots into such a process. The combined application of shooting scripts and grounded theory allows the researcher to see *sociologically*, it encompasses 'the ability to reveal patterns, features or details in a research setting or topic – such aspects of material culture, subjects' characteristics or behavior, etc. – that are not readily apparent in less acute observations of that reality.' (p.35).

Although I find the shooting script approach very productive for detecting patterns in visual data and developing concepts through analysis, there is a danger that the apparent implicated primacy of the visual in sociological seeing might lead to the misinterpretation that objects of study can be fully knowable or fully captured. This is not to suggest that Suchar argues that the 'truth' is out there waiting to be uncovered by the rigorous researcher. On the contrary, he does hint at knowledge being constructed through a systematic iterative process of data gathering, theory and analysis. However, a more robust approach to the construction of knowledge is offered by Rose who suggests that images are 'prisms that refract what can be seen in quite particular ways', rather than 'transparent windows that allow us to peer into places we would never otherwise see' (Rose, 2008, p.151). Invoking Rose, therefore, I have used the images in this paper to refracture how we might see allotment, community and guerrilla gardens.

At the start of his paper on grounding visual sociology research in shooting scripts, Suchar argues that completed research projects involving photography are often 'presented with scant mention of how such methods were arrived at' (Suchar, 1997, p.33). In his writing he attempts to demystify this and spells out very clearly how he has analysed visual material as part of his study. However, he does not seem to critically reflect on his own role in shaping the research data and results.

As researchers we bring our own preconceptions into a research project. During the research process slippages occur and accidents happen despite our best

efforts to structure our projects coherently. Sociologist John Law writes about how scientists' attempts to clarify concepts that are complex, diffuse and messy 'simply increases the mess' (Law, 2004, p.2). He argues that we should understand methods as 'performative' and productive of realities (p.143).

From this perspective, research methods such as ethnography and photography can be thought of as performed embodied practices of interpretation and translation. Knowledge is produced, transformed, rewritten, and altered by the analytical process of writing field notes and memos, coding images and reading theory.

Thus, instead of asserting that research methodologies produce some sort of objective knowledge isolated from systems of power and history, my work is aligned with anthropology and feminist scholars who argue that knowledge is partial and situated (Haraway, 1991). The anthropologist James Clifford puts it as follows: 'power and history work through them [ethnographic texts], in ways their authors cannot fully control'. He goes on to say, 'ethnographic truths are thus inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete' (Clifford, 2010, p.7). In her discussion of situated knowledges, positionality and self-reflexivity, Rose suggests that we 'inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands' (Rose, 1997, p.319). I recognise this concern for reflecting on and writing about the absences and fallibilities created by our research practices in the work of media studies scholar Karin Becker (2000, pp.117–19). Her study of an allotment garden in Sweden not only interrogates the social and spatial practices that produce a distinctive, multi-layered landscape of cultivation, but also discusses the contradictions and interrelations between her own photographic practice, academic journal editors' decisions, and culturally dominant visual representations of allotment sites as spaces of ethnic diversity in Sweden.

In light of my discussion on sociological seeing I suggest that a critical application of the shooting script approach requires an iterative reflective research process that acknowledges the partiality and situatedness of the knowledge produced.

Looking at boundaries

Suchar's shooting script methodology provided me with a productive departure point for visually interrogating the spatial demarcations of gardens and the ways they are situated in the city. This approach helped me to better understand how and who constructs and



Figures 6.4 a–b: *Photo-series Community Garden Outer Boundaries*, 2013, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This photo-series was made at the beginning of the fieldwork and was driven by the ‘shooting script’ to record the outer boundaries of the urban gardens. The top image depicts one of the sides of the community garden site and is taken from the parking lot that borders the garden. The second image shows the ‘back’ of the garden. This gate is only used by the garden managers for occasional deliveries of compost, and the public cannot enter the garden from this site. It is impossible to walk all around the outer edges of the community garden as it borders former warehouses, a construction site, and private parking lots. These images evidence that the garden cannot be easily ‘seen’ from the outside, and despite being located in the midst of a busy district in East London, its site is ‘marginal’, echoing the observations of Stevens (2007, p. 114) that marginal places in the city offer opportunities for play. In fact, the community garden used to be a small piece of wasteland.



Figures 6.5 a–b: *Photo-series Community Garden Inner Boundaries*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). These are two snapshots of a typical Saturday afternoon inside the community garden. The top image represents a garden boundary practice that I also observed at allotment gardens: the use of fences and wires to define an inside and outside and to discipline users of the space. Here, garden volunteers are spanning a thread between poles installed around a new area of plants, whilst garden visitors pass by. The wires are intended to prevent visitors from trampling on the plants. Another manifestation of the minutiae of spatial negotiations within the community garden between volunteers and visitors can be seen in the bottom image, as a volunteer holding a red plastic trunk navigates her way through a hive of activity of visitors socialising and children playing. The volunteer is heading towards the ‘back’ of the garden to collect compost from the compost heap, which is hidden from view by the fully-grown edges of the garden which mainly consists of honeysuckle bushes. The garden managers deliberately refrained from cutting back these bushes in order to create the feel of a secluded green space; this created an area at the back that is less inviting for visitors, for storage that allows for storage space. Again, this image represents a pattern I identify across gardening practices, namely the multiple ways in which plants become actants in creating difference. Gardeners pick and cultivate particular plant species to highlight a boundary between ‘their’ garden and an ‘other’ space.

maintains these boundaries. The formulation of my 'shooting script' was informed by the wider research project's concern with the relations between play and work as enacted in urban gardening practices. Furthermore, the shooting script was embedded in an ethnographic approach that combined photography with participant observations, and interviews. The research tried to reveal the socialities created, values attributed, and spatialities and temporalities produced by allotment, community and guerrilla gardens in cities.

The project reconceptualises urban garden sites as playgrounds *and* places of work and discusses the tensions and contradictions that this renewed understanding brings up. This responds to cultural historian Johan Huizinga, whose influential publication *Homo Ludens*, originally published in 1938, envisioned playgrounds as bounded spaces, set apart from everyday life. He described the distinct qualities of playgrounds using spatial terms such as 'hedged round' 'isolated' and 'hallowed' (Huizinga, 1971, p.10). Almost seventy years later, urban designer Quentin Stevens has developed this aspect of Huizinga's thesis in his book *The Ludic City* (2007), in which Stevens speaks of the importance of boundaries, edges, and marginal secluded sites for play to occur in the city (Stevens, 2007, p.114). Both these authors draw attention to practices of play at the edge zones in cities and encourage sensitivity to the spatial and temporal boundaries of playgrounds. Reflecting these approaches, my ethnographic study of allotment, community and guerrilla gardens in London tried to unpack the spatial boundaries of these sites. The shooting script provided one of the ways to focus in on the construction of the gardens' edges.

Inspired by Suchar's discussion on combining the shooting script and grounded theory, I repeatedly refined my research questions and rewrote my shooting script during the process of data gathering and analysis. The key question I started off with was: 'If boundaries form such an important aspect of the conceptualisation and spatial imagination of the garden and the playground, how does this manifest visually?' (see Figure 6.4). Through repeated field visits, I refined this question further: 'How are borders being made and remade at allotment, community and guerrilla gardens?' to emphasise more clearly the ongoing practices of shaping the gardens' edges. Gradually, I also started to pay more attention in particular to the various demarcations and negotiations within gardens.

Instead of thinking through the outer physical borders of the whole site, I also became interested in the negotiations between allotment gardeners, between community gardener volunteers and visitors (see Figure 6.5), and between guerrilla gardeners and

passers-by. This process of refinement brought to the fore the hive of activity in multiple edge zones. It also made visible diverse material cultures, and highlighted questions of ownership, entitlement and management of the respective garden spaces, and the notion of the individual versus the collective. In the process of making photos-series and iterative attempts at coding and writing memos, I began to understand that these garden boundaries were not impermeable and fixed, but rather porous and always in the process of being made.

Moving from analogue to digital photography

The research tools that we choose and the ways in which we use them play a part in shaping our research outcomes, and for this particular research project I found digital photography the most appropriate technology to use, because of its functionalities and affordability. Suchar, and other early visual sociologists, worked with analogue photography, and my move from analogue to digital photography has had several implications for the application of the shooting script approach. First of all, in an analogue 'world', rolls of film introduce a particular limit to the number of images that can be taken with each film roll, and as research budgets are often constrained for small scale ethnographic studies, purchasing and developing large amounts of film rolls is often not an option. By contrast, the sets of images produced by digital cameras are not limited by the length of the film roll (approximately 36 photos), but rather by the size of the SD-card inside the body of the camera (depending on its settings 1000+ photos). An example of analogue use is Karin Becker's six-year study of an allotment site in Sweden, which produced 900 colour slides and 30 film rolls (Becker, 2000, p.101). By comparison, for this research project, I produced about 3338 images in a two-year fieldwork period. In other words, one year of fieldwork with analogue photography generated approximately 330 images, while digital photography resulted in 1669 images, the latter being about five times as much as the former. Differences in materials and technologies present different challenges. A digital camera, which can produce multiple images, allows the researcher to capture multiple perspectives of the object under investigation; yet it also means there is a much larger data set to analyse. It becomes increasingly important to define the parameters of the visual investigation, in order to maintain a rigorous analytical process. This raised new questions for my research: how much time should I spend analysing each individual image? How should I store and categorise these images?

Following on from these questions, another difference between analogue and digital photography comes to the fore, as ‘contact sheets’ were a common way of getting an overview of the images made and offered a standardised means of sorting and archiving images. The shooting script approach relies heavily on these contact sheets, which enable one to view a series of images in a single moment and to glide one’s fingers over the individual images. It also allows for annotations to be made in the margins. For Suchar (1997), contact sheets were part of the logging procedure, open coding, and the writing of memos. The contact sheets take on a similar importance in Becker’s (2000, p.108) earlier mentioned visual study of a Swedish allotment, where she describes how she and her research partner would use the contact sheets to add detail and comments to their shared field notes. To be clear, Becker’s research practice was not informed by Suchar’s shooting script approach, but the study is mentioned here as it was also conducted with analogue photo cameras and employed contact sheets. With regard to my study, it must also be noted that instead of film and print contact sheet, I initially used virtual contact sheets by means of Adobe Bridge software (see Figure 6.6). The digital interface could be described as an ever changeable ‘contact sheet’, as it can be altered with just

a few mouse clicks. It allows for layering, zooming in and out, assembling and re-assembling, and therefore for multiple opportunities to compare data, and in this study, this was useful for the comparison between different gardening practices (allotment, community and guerrilla).

The software package also facilitates a smooth and expansive open coding process, as individual files can be tagged and untagged with multiple labels. This allowed me to go through the data set several times at different points of the research process and assign labels to images, such as ‘traces of work’, ‘encounters’, ‘inner boundaries’, ‘outer boundaries’ and ‘sage cutting’. It was then easy to regroup these and make new temporary contact sheets, to select only the images labelled ‘inner boundaries’, for example (as displayed in Figure 6.6). The screen interface thus facilitated comparisons across the whole data set, as well as within smaller coded segments. Options to zoom in and out, scroll through, and linger on individual images enhanced the process of putting together this photo-essay in productive and creative ways. In comparison to analogue photography, digital thus offers greater functionality and flexibility and software packages such as Adobe Bridge provide multiple ways of processing and analysing visual data. Different tools and

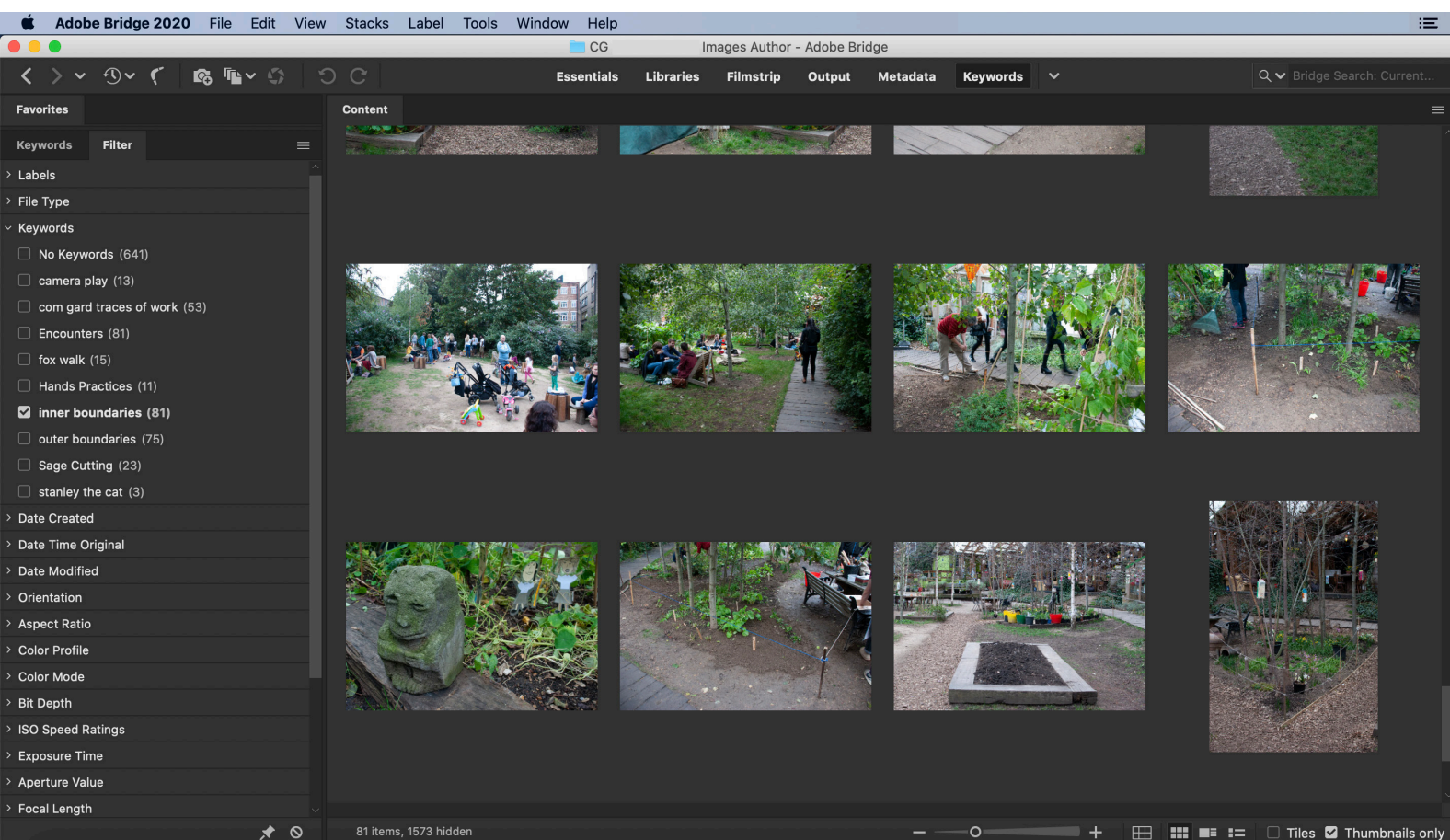


Figure 6.6: Screenshot of the Adobe® Bridge software – Community Garden Images tagged ‘inner boundaries’, 2020, digital image. (Adobe product screenshot(s) reprinted with permission from Adobe)

technologies mediate the ways in which researchers engage with their data; large data sets present particular challenges to researchers.

However, I found that it was more helpful for the *thinking* process to annotate print outs by hand. Adobe Bridge software does not have the functionality to add extensive memos to images, and sometimes the immediacy and embodiment of writing notes by hand is more productive. Thus, as first step, I would tag images in an open coding process in the software package, and from these I would generate contact sheets of these tagged images to facilitate further focused coding, as can be seen in Figure 6.3. In other words, I navigated between virtual and material technologies, deploying paper or digital formats depending on what suited a particular part of the process best.

Thirdly, an important difference between the use of analogue and digital photography in ethnographic studies is digital photography's ability to reveal immediately to research participants the images one has taken. This ability to share in-situ the kinds of photos one is taking can help to build trust between researcher and participants. Furthermore, pictures can be shared more easily with participants. During my fieldwork, I have had multiple instances of such sharing. This is markedly different to developing film and printing photos after the event, and then returning to the field to share these images. Hence, the tools of analysis deployed by the researcher – their functionalities and materialities – also influence research outcomes.

Going off script

Contrary to my personal experience of doing fieldwork with a photo camera, Suchar's writings on the shooting script lacks an explicit discussion of chance discoveries and the contingencies involved in the research process. Although Suchar underscores the 'flexible character of the shooting script' and sees 'the entire photographic field process as an interactive and conceptually-based enterprise' (Suchar, 1997, p.40), he does not go into great detail. Therefore, I invoke the anthropologist Michael Taussig's book *I Swear I Saw This*, in which the author reflects on drawings in fieldwork notebooks and discusses 'the play of chance in the dialectic of order and disorder' in scrapbooks and notebooks (Taussig, 2011, p.56). He continues by saying:

In my own work, perhaps better thought of as my own life, I can think of discoveries like this that came about through chance. I think of the hard work I have done and even more of all the waiting and boredom as not exactly irrelevant but as nothing more than a necessary prelude

for chance to show its hand. The way I see it, a plan of research is little more than an excuse for the real thing to come along, in much the same way as the anthropologist Vincent Turner¹ [sic] described the value of writing down kinship diagrams as largely an excuse to stop falling asleep on the job and provide a situation in which the real stuff got a chance to emerge.

(Taussig, 2011, p.59)

Bringing the camera to the 'field' and working with the shooting script can produce what Taussig describes as a 'necessary prelude for chance to show its hand'. Rather than applying a rigid interpretation to the notion of 'script' I propose instead to regard it as an 'excuse' to spend time at a fieldwork site and thereby create opportunities to have one's presumptions and preconceptions challenged by encounters with research participants.

In my notebook I have made countless records of how I bumped into allotment gardeners while walking around taking pictures. My photographic practice prompted these gardeners to start a conversation about their allotment plots and in this process I gained valuable new insights and made connections for future interviews. Looking back to Figure 6.1, the lines drawn on the map actually give a false impression of a continuous process of taking pictures; the lines should in fact be interrupted and blurry to better represent the multiple encounters I had with allotment gardeners along the way. The hand-drawn map *accidentally* evidences the dialectic of order and disorder in ethnographic research that Taussig writes about. On the one hand, the map reflects my drive to *order* information, to document exactly how I had been walking around the allotment site. In this little clumsy map drawn in my notebook I tried to be as precise and complete as possible about how I implemented the shooting script. On the other hand, the map does not indicate the multiple encounters I had whilst being in the field – it misses out the *disorder* involved in fieldwork.

Another instance of chance discovery within fieldwork occurred during a guerrilla gardening dig I joined on an autumn Sunday afternoon in South London. Previously, I had been observing and thinking about the construction of spatial boundaries of urban gardens in terms of the placement of objects or signs to demarcate an inside and outside – see for instance the fences between allotment garden plots depicted in Figure 6.2 and the thread spun at the community garden between the path and a freshly planted area

¹ The end notes refer to 'Vincent Crapanzano' rather than 'Vincent Turner', essay 'At the Heart of the Discipline'.



Figure 6.7 a–b: *Photo-series Guerrilla Gardening*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). The top image depicts a row of three raised planters neglected by the local council but looked after by guerrilla gardeners in South London near a busy bus stop. The bottom image shows the rubbish I collected with a guerrilla gardener during an autumn afternoon. On the left is a rubbish bin filled to the brim with litter that we picked up from the three raised planters. On the right a large paper bag can be seen stuffed with garden waste. This recycling bag was brought by the guerrilla gardener and would be collected by the local council.

in Figure 6.5. On this afternoon, however, I was taken by surprise as I found myself helping the guerrilla gardener collect rubbish from a set of three raised planters near a bus stop in South London (see Figure 6.7). We spent at least half the time of the guerrilla garden dig picking up beer and soda cans, bags of crisps, half eaten chicken legs, plastic forks, cigarette lighters and other litter. Once that task was finished, we did some weeding, planted some seedlings and pulled the dead leaves off the irises. This pattern repeated itself in other guerrilla digs I joined, and it made me rethink gardening as a practice in the city. In contrast to my earlier observations at the allotment and community garden regarding the placement of objects and signs, guerrilla gardeners' claims on urban space and the delineation of the boundaries of a guerrilla garden intervention were co-constituted through the removal of objects. Their cultivation practices were thus bound up with the ordering of objects, the collection of litter, an active process of defining what they perceived to be *in* and *out* of the guerrilla garden patch – reminiscent of Mary Douglas' discussion on dirt as 'matter out of place' (James, 1952, p. 129 in Douglas, 2001, p. 165). If I had not conducted participant observations and solely focused on taking pictures, I would not have been able to gain these new insights. It was only because I had put my photo camera aside and joined in the guerrilla gardening practice, that I could start to rethink the construction of garden boundaries. This vignette further exemplifies Taussig's comments about the importance of the accidental and contingent in fieldwork, which encouraged me to go beyond Suchar's shooting script, to be ready to go *off* script.

The vignettes explored in this paper also speak to the notion of presences and absences produced in fieldwork encounters, analysis and writing. First, whilst I observed that my presence with a photo camera at the allotment site instigated multiple encounters with allotment gardeners, I cannot know to what extent I scared people away due to my investigative presence with a camera. It is much harder to account for events that did not unfold in the 'field', which may have been caused by particular gestures made and or technologies used. Secondly, my unplanned temporary abandonment of the camera made it possible to render visible the significance that rubbish collection had for the claim on and cultivation of a guerrilla garden. What falls in and out of the frame then, cannot be fully controlled by the researcher; however, we can acknowledge these limitations, think *beyond* the shooting script, and develop a sensitivity towards the absences and presences created by our work.

Seeing patterns on the ground

Working critically with Suchar's shooting script approach has helped me to see the distinctive patterns on the ground made and remade by the urban gardeners that I studied in London – as further evidenced in Figures 6.8 to 6.11. What is more, these figures demonstrate the importance of embedding visual methodologies in a wider web of research methods, in this case participant observations and interviews. The triangulation between images, fieldnotes, and interview transcripts enabled me to see distinct patterns on the ground, helped me to tease out the tensions between themes and concepts, and enrich the account of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners. The images played a pivotal part in this process of triangulation; they did not function as mere illustration of the arguments presented here but were constitutive of it.

Geographer Russell Hitchings has argued that material culture studies have often focused on inert and durable objects, thereby rendering invisible the lively material cultures of gardening (Hitchings, 2006). In his study of private gardens he highlighted the 'creativity' that gardeners enacted in working with the different agencies in the garden; in the delicate interplay between gardeners and the plants. As Suchar suggested (1997, p.35), shooting scripts can be vehicles to study the characteristics of material cultures – he uses the example of his own study of gentrification by photographing changes in housing façades. My research develops Suchar's understanding of the suitability of photography for the study of material culture further by demonstrating the effectiveness of photography for studying the *lively* material cultures of public gardens. I suggest that the shaping of the garden – the 'design' of the garden – involves a continuous process of work and responsiveness to changing conditions. Gardeners improvise, re-use and appropriate materials, cultivate plant growth in-situ, and are informed by embodied knowledge, trial and error, rather than executing blueprints.

Instead of seeing garden spaces as fixed cultural representations, I work with geographer Steve Hinchcliffe's idea of gardens as embodied practiced landscapes (Hinchcliffe, 2002). Moreover, these lively landscapes of doing are, as feminist geographer Robyn Longhurst suggests, 'imbued with multiple, ambiguous and paradoxical meanings' (Longhurst, 2006, p.582). The images presented in this text aim to bring out the distinctive patterning of the ground of allotment, community and guerrilla gardener. I also take inspiration from the work of cultural geographer David Crouch, who has written extensively on allotment landscapes

and cultures (Crouch and Ward, 1997, Crouch, 2003). In a recent publication on gardening, he observed:

In its practice of gender, ethnicity, class, or even age gardening can render distinctive patterning of the ground, shapes in the vegetation, and in the structures used in the process

(Crouch, 2020, p.255).

This distinctiveness in the patterning of the ground – their ambiguities and tensions – come to the fore in Figure 6.8–6.11: in guerrilla gardener Lisa’s inscription of difference made by her choice of plants (Figure 6.8); in allotment gardener Antonio’s artichoke plants’ disruptive co-habitation with foxes (Figure 6.9); in the aesthetic conflict around the re-use of bath tubs at the allotment site (Figure 6.10); and lastly by the signs

drawn by local school children to guard ‘their’ bit of the community garden from unconsidered garden visitors (Figure 6.11). Similar to Becker’s findings at an allotment site in Sweden, fences and borders ‘often stood for aesthetic conflicts amongst the gardeners’ (Becker, 2000, p.113), but I would like to add that these boundary-making practices also reflect a creative process. Unlike popular imaginations of the garden as a space of seclusion, peace and tranquillity, garden spaces can be thought of as sites of contestation and creativity. This photo-series supports the argument that allotment, community and guerrilla gardens are spaces made through the ongoing social and spatial negotiations between gardeners, plants, animals and its urban surroundings – a process that I trace in the multiple boundary-making practices discussed here.



Figure 6.8: Guerrilla Garden South London: Iris plants and Council Planting, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). Choosing and cultivating particular plant species in order to create difference, to highlight a boundary, and to claim a space, is also practiced by the guerrilla gardeners that I researched. In several instances, guerrilla gardeners ‘took over’ or simply started to cultivate neglected council planters along the road and in neighbourhoods. This image shows a particular guerrilla intervention in South London (same location as in Figure 6.7). During an interview, guerrilla gardener Lisa, who tends these raised beds, shared her views on her gardening practice and the ways others respond to it: *‘And a lot of people have remarked on the difference between the constrained old fashioned council planting which neighbours [compared to] what I have done. Which is this [the council planting] traditional bedding plants, that have been bred for weather-resistance and long-lasting colour, but no nectar at all. Again, you might as well have plastic flowers. It’s really annoying! (both laugh) It’s also annoying that they are still in flower and, you know, red or purple. And my plants have dried out. But mine are good for the environment, theirs are useless (laughs). Yes, it does look fantastic!’*. This extract reveals that Lisa’s guerrilla gardening practice is informed by her concern for aesthetics and the environment in urban spaces. In this particular instance, Lisa has planted the species ‘Iris actress’, which is known for attracting bees (see foreground of the image) in a raised bed that contains the traditional council bedding plant (see background image), which articulates difference across the planter. According to Lisa this has been noticed by several people passing by.



Figure 6.9: *Allotment Plot Boundary – Row of Artichoke Plants*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). Across all three case studies gardeners not only demarcated ‘their’ garden spaces through the careful placement of artefacts but also by cultivating particular plants in specific locations. The latter is exemplified in this image, which shows a neatly planted row of artichoke plants along the edge of an allotment plot. The artichoke plants are grown to be harvested, yet their linear pattern also produces a ‘green’ boundary between two allotment plots. This not only constitutes a visual distinction but also a very tactile one, as its dangling prickly leaves encroach onto the path. While I was taking pictures, I bumped into allotment gardener Antonio, and we chatted about the artichokes, red and white onions, Borlotti beans, and potatoes he is growing. He also showed me some artichoke plants that were trampled upon by foxes. Next to his plot, situated below the ground just outside the allotment site, two fox families are living. The young cubs had been playing with plastic bags and had run amok across his artichoke plants, leaving behind broken stems and leaves. Antonio looked at me with amusement and said, ‘*you can’t do nothing about the animals*’. Whilst his fellow allotment gardeners respected the boundaries of his plot, these boundaries were not registered by the local foxes.



Figure 6.10: *Allotment Plot Boundary – Make-Shift Structures*, 2014, digital image. (Photo: Jan van Duppen). This image represents a make-shift material culture, a creative ad-hoc repurposing of waste materials that I identified specifically at the allotment site. My analysis of the visual material suggests that not only are pallets re-used by gardeners (see Figure 6.2), but all sorts of material like plastic and glass bottles, cd's, bathtubs, shopping baskets (plastic and metal), piles of paper brochures, washing machines, stoves, fruit baskets, pots and pans, carpets and tapestry. There is a creativity involved in the repurposing of these waste materials. What can be seen at the allotment site are not so much pre-given designs, or finished products, but rather ad-hoc structures made from found and scavenged materials that have functional purposes in gardening practices. More often than not, these improvisations with and repurposing of waste material become distinctive forms of 'self-expression' (Crouch, 2020, p.256). In this particular case, an allotment gardener has repurposed disposed bath tubes as water reservoirs. At the same time as collecting rainwater for watering, the tubs reinforce the boundary between two plots as they are placed along the edges of the plot. This kind of re-purposing of skip materials is not appreciated by all allotment gardeners, as the following extract from a conversation with Paul the allotment site secretary shows: 'I can understand why people want baths on their plots to collect water. But after a while, they just start to collect rubbish. They also look a bit of an eyesore to me. I mean a "nice" plastic bath ... I am into aesthetics as well as practicality'. Paul's comment reveals tensions amongst allotment gardens about what an allotment should look like, and it confirms that the patterns on the ground cannot be solely understood as traces of growing vegetables and fruits.



Figure 6.11: *Community Garden Boundary – Signs made by children, 2014, digital image.* (Photo: Jan van Duppen). One of the ways in which gardeners lay claims on their garden space was by using labels and signs. This tactic – to sometimes gently, sometimes explicitly, ‘own’ a space and delineate difference – is demonstrated by this image of hand-drawn figures at the community garden. The community garden collaborates with a local primary school. The group of pupils that comes in every week have made these small signs out of plasticized paper stuck onto stalks. They pierced these figures into the soil of the raised bed that *they* cultivate in the garden. These signs are staking a claim on the raised bed and they communicate to other visitors that they are gardening there. The colourful hand-drawn figures can be seen as mascots to prevent disruption of the cultivation, gentle claims on territory, whilst also encouraging a sense of ownership for the children who are tending the raised beds every week.

Reflections

While reflecting on field-based photography I have tried to destabilise rigid and finite definitions and applications of the 'shooting script' and instead have rethought it as a process of performed, embodied practices of interpretation and translation which produces partial truths. Bringing a camera to the 'field' brings up all sorts of complicated questions and challenges for researchers both when 'out there', but perhaps even more so, later, at one's desk. The shooting script combined with grounded theory then provides productive ways of structuring the research process, and it encourages the researcher not simply to use images as illustrations: these visual fragments can become an integral part of formulating an argument and rethinking a concept. I have found this method useful for studying the boundary-making practices of allotment, community and guerrilla gardeners in London, and for reconceptualising gardens as spaces of creativity and contestation. I started to see the patterns on the ground, due to an iterative rigorous process of working with images made in the field in combination with participant observation and interviews.

This methodology seems very apt for the analysis of social and spatial negotiations that shape our urban surroundings and I think its application can be useful for social science and design researchers, especially when triangulated with other methodologies. For this process to be fruitful, though, we have to critically address our selection of particular technologies and the ways in which we use them, as this will co-constitute the research outcomes. This means thinking carefully about the affordances and limitations of the media and technology that we deploy, and inscribing into our publications reflections on for instance the choice for digital versus analogue photography, or the implications of the mixed use of software packages and paper notebooks during analysis. What is more, we must attempt to address the presences and absences produced by our fieldwork, analysis and writing, while being aware of our inability to fully account for it. Finally, using a script should not mean that we cannot divert from it, or become blind to what happens around us while in the field. Instead it can be a tool to spend time in the field, to appear 'busy' while waiting for an important lead to unfold. Nurturing an openness towards the accidental and the contingent during fieldwork is then as important as following the script.

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