

Book Review

Banks, M. & Zeitlyn, D. (2015). *Visual method in social research*. (2nd ed). London: SAGE Publication. 189 pp. ISBN 978-1-4462-6974-9

Reviewed by *Quang Nam Pham*^{*}, *University of South Florida, USA*

The book, *Visual Methods in Social Research*, was published as the second edition in 2015 with many updates on examples from a variety of sources such as photographs, films and social media. The authors, David Zeitlyn and Marcus Banks, are professors of anthropology at the University of Oxford. In addition to their numerous research in history and social anthropology, they have developed standing interests in using visual methods to explore human artifacts. In recent years David Zeitlyn worked with photographers to create multiple exhibition archives while Marcus Banks published documentary films and conducted research in image production.

Visual Methods in Social Research provides an insightful demonstration of visual methods in social science. The purpose of the book is to “provide a concise account of some of the ways in which social scientists can incorporate visual images into their research, together with a discussion of why they might wish to” (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015, p. ix). This book addresses the current trend to increase the understanding of human behaviors through analysis of images in social practices.

The book contains 208 pages and has a total of seven chapters. In the first chapter, “Reading Pictures,” the authors provide a comprehensive account of how to interpret the meanings behind visual images, including photos and films. The second chapter, “Encountering the Visuals,” mostly focuses on visual representation in anthropology within Euro-American society. By offer a wide range of photos, images and network visualization as examples, the authors have vividly elaborated the concept of visual representation, thus making it more understandable for readers. In chapter three, the authors extend their conversation to explain the materiality in the representation of photographs. They specifically discuss the political implications of displaying family photographs and the matter of how we digitally view and exchange photographs with computer-based media. In chapter four, “Research Strategies,” the authors transition to how to use visual images as a research tool. They successfully describe photo- and film-elicitation—one of the good strategies to examine visual artifacts and delve deeply into their meaning—through multiple ethnographic examples from different contexts. In chapter five, the authors argue a researcher cannot be an outsider during the observation process by illustrating how images or visual documentations are created. The next chapter reports audiences’ reactions towards visual artifacts and explain how they can be useful for visual method researchers during their presentations of image analysis. The final chapter covers the authors’ anticipation of future visual methods in social research in general and in anthropology specifically.

In *Visual Methods in Social Research*, the authors attempt to connect production with interpretation, which, from my perspective, is the most prominent value of the book. In addition,

^{*}University of South Florida; namquangpham@mail.usf.edu

visual artifacts displayed or discussed in this book are not limited to traditional sources; instead, the authors attempt to diversify visual images by incorporating other sources such as Internet or social media. Perhaps the most impressive part of the book is the variety of perspectives and pertinent examples in visual methods being discussed and displayed. The overall well-structured content, helpful methodological scaffolds and engaging writing styles in the book can be of great benefit to scholars and students who are committed to conducting research in visual approach.

Visual Methods in Social Research explains different visual methods in an engaging and detailed manner. As a reader, I learned the process of making images for research purposes and interpreting data. While I admit this book contains a thorough examination of interactions among visual images, human behaviors and social practices, the authors' indifferent elaboration of the complex relationship among materiality, physical attributes, sensualities, textures for visual objects still exists in some pages. I, however, do understand it may not be possible to address all aspects within a book. Despite this reservation, the book is still of high quality and a great tool for visual researchers.

Upon searching for a visual method research book, I noticed two different categories. The first category involves books that explore the visual world theoretically while the second addresses the topic more practically. There are not many available options that can combine these two aspects in an insightful manner, as does *Visual Methods in Social Research*. The academic language in this book engages advanced readers in the sophisticated aspects of creating and interpreting visual data (e.g., photographs, paintings, models, diagrams, drawings and films). Therefore, I strongly recommend this book for those who would like to get advancement in their knowledge of interpreting visual materials or developing tools for image-based research in social sciences.

Manuscript received July 11, 2018
Final revision received August 05, 2018
Accepted September 14, 2018