

Viewfinders Thoughts on Visual Design Research

Bas Raijmakers & Samantha Miller / STBY

in collaboration with the Interaction Research Studio, Goldsmiths, University of London

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Viewfinders: Thoughts on Visual Design Research
STBY

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Preface

We believe there's a gap out there — one we can start to fill as design researchers.

Photography and film are particularly well-suited for design research, as they provide deep qualitative insight into an experience, serve as design inspiration and can be revisited and re-analysed for ongoing reflection. Although visual research methods have gained traction and recognition across the social sciences, there is still relatively little critical inquiry into how photography and film can be used specifically as a design research method.

In addition, investigations into visual research methods can tend to focus on visual analysis¹ as opposed to how we can take photographs or make films as design researchers. However, more recently researchers have begun to ask important questions around the role visual material can play in various design disciplines, from photography in HCI² to visualisations in service design³. Similarly, discussions around documentary film theory and practice since its origin in the late 19th century can inform and influence design research methods⁴.

Viewfinders is part of a self-initiated project by STBY, co-funded by Innovate UK and in collaboration with Goldsmiths' Interaction Research Studio, which began with an initial interest in investigating a method for visual design research. We designed and deployed an 'auto-cam', a research tool combining a wearable camera with

sensor technology. This publication builds on our investigation of visual design research, looking across film, photography and more experimental approaches in this space.

This publication doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but instead offers observations and reflections on our experiences, things we have tried and learned from in projects and experiments. We hope to grow the discourse around visual design research in an inspiring way for those working in the field, from peers to academics to industry teams who commission this kind of work. Photography and film hold rich potential for design research, deserving our attention, critical consideration and further exploration.

- 1 Knoblauch et. al. (2008). Visual Analysis. New Developments in the Interpretative Analysis of Video and Photography. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 9(3), Art. 14.
- 2 Bariola, P. and Faste, H. (2012). The Application of Photography to Research in Human-Computer Interaction Design. *Submitted to CHI 2012*, Austin, TX, May 2012.
- 3 Diana, C., Pacenti, E., & Tassi, R. (2009). Visualtiles: Communication tools for (service) design. Conference proceedings ServDes.2009; *DeThinking Service; ReThinking Design*; Oslo, Norway 24-26 November 2009.
- 4 Raijmakers, B. (2007). *Design documentaries: Using documentary film to inspire design*. (Doctoral thesis, Royal College of Art, Design Interactions, London, UK)



**Eyes like
a shutter,
mind like
a lens.**

About STBY

STBY is a design research consultancy specialised in design research for service innovation. Based in London and Amsterdam, our creative research projects connect organisations with the lives and experiences of their customers. This helps our clients to innovate their service offering, making it more valuable for both their customers and their business. Our projects generate rich, visually illustrated and engaging materials, that bring real people into the heart of service innovation processes. STBY is also a founding member of REACH, a global design research network.

www.stby.eu

www.globaldesignresearch.com

About the Interaction Research Studio

The Interaction Research Studio explores the design of computational systems for everyday life. We produce research devices — fully finished product prototypes — embodying new concepts for interaction. We don't pursue design as problem solving, but instead design products to create situations that encourage playfulness, exploration and insight. Peoples' experiences with our devices bring insights into new possibilities for technologies, and for peoples's sociocultural engagements with the world more generally.

www.gold.ac.uk/interaction

About the authors

Bas Raijmakers PhD (RCA)

Bas Raijmakers is co-founder and Creative Director of STBY in London and Amsterdam, working for clients in the public sector and industry. Bas has a background in cultural studies, the Internet industry and interaction design. His main passion is to bring the people for whom we design into design and innovation processes, using visual storytelling. He holds a PhD in Design Interactions from the Royal College of Art, in London. He is also Reader (Lector) in Strategic Creativity at Design Academy Eindhoven.

Samantha Miller

Sam is a Design Researcher at STBY in London, particularly interested in visual design research through photography and video and designing engaging research materials and prompts. She holds an MA in Interaction Design Research from Goldsmiths, University of London and a BA in Sociology from New York University. Her work has been presented at the 2014 Microsoft Research Design Expo in Seattle, WA and at enter14 at Waterman's Art Centre in London.

Contents

Capturing everyday life	8
Thinking with pictures	14
Catching up on film history	20
Making and using design documentaries	28
How documentary film can inspire design research	36
Both a design researcher and photographer	42
Photography in the field	50
Multiple meanings	58
Pushing the boundaries	64
Experimenting with the auto-cam	72
Technological implications	80
Visual futures	86