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ADVANCES IN VISUAL METHODOLOGY

An Introduction

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It was surely no coincidence that just at the turn of the 21st century four books about visual methodology were published: Marcus Banks' *Visual Methods in Social Research* (2001), my own *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2007a [2001]), Gillian Rose's text book *Visual Methodologies* (2010 [2000]) and Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt's edited volume *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* (2001). This marked a moment in the social sciences and humanities where for a number of reasons the visual was becoming more acceptable, more viable and more central to qualitative research practice. As the century moved on these works were accompanied by an increasing number of further publications, conferences, seminars and training events focused on visual methodologies. The field has since developed in exciting and divergent ways. It is losing none of its momentum and indeed continues to inspire innovative and important studies across a range of disciplines as well as further theoretical and methodological reflection. It is, moreover, an area of academic and applied research that demonstrates particularly powerfully that the relationship between theory, technology and method should not be separated. Understanding methodology is concerned with comprehending how we know as well as the environments in which this knowing is produced; as such, it involves engaging with a philosophy of knowledge, of practice and of place and space. Research methods and the practical engagements they entail are inextricable from this process. It is therefore important to engage with both simultaneously and in doing so to depart from the theory/methods divide. In the case of visual methodology this means understanding and engaging not only with the newest and latest theoretical developments in our fields, but also with the ways that these are co-implicated with technological developments and media practices. *Advances in Visual Methodology* contributes to this task. It draws together in a single volume a set of key advances and explorations that sit at the innovative edge of

theory and practice in contemporary visual methodologies. It presents a critical and reflexive engagement with interdisciplinary practice in the field of visual research and representation as it is currently developing and emerging, and casts of a series of inspirations and challenges for its future.

We now find ourselves at a new stage in the development of visual methodology as a field of interdisciplinary and post-disciplinary practice that spans scholarly and applied concerns. This era in visual methodological work is of course characterised by both continuities and departures from the past trajectories of visual and media theory and practice as they have been developed in, across and between various different academic and applied disciplines. To understand this emergent context, as well as to project it as a continuing endeavour as the 21st century unfolds, here I take visual methodology to be a field of practice. It is not my aim in this introduction to review the vast and ever increasing literature that has gone before. Rather, first I map out some of the key themes and strands in this field in order to suggest how and why they are becoming interwoven in contexts that are increasingly post-disciplinary and multi-method.

This volume considers visual methodologies as a set of approaches to working with the visual in research and representation that are constantly in progress and development. Every piece of research has the potential to be used to respond to the methodological frame through which it was originally conceived. For some scholars the methodology is a tool through which to achieve research findings, and for them it is the latter that are most important as a contribution to knowledge. Yet for others, including those who contribute to this volume, methodology is something that should be critically reflected on as a crucial component in the processes through which we produce knowledge. From this latter perspective the research process and the methodology that informs it cannot be separated from the findings of the research, right through from research design to its representation. This problematises practices such as data sharing, complicates team working, and requires thorough interrogations of perspective, epistemology and the philosophical and moral commitments of researchers in collaborative and interdisciplinary work endeavours.

In part, such rethinkings of methodological principles are provoked because the very tools of visual research have undergone radical transformations. Some would argue that these technological developments produce shifts that change the very way that we are able to conceptualise and experience the social and electronic realities in which so many of us live. Others would stress the continuities that are apparent in how researchers engage with technological innovations, echoing the uses they had for earlier designs. Indeed ethnographers, who more typically focus on the ways in which technologies, software and images become part of social relations, tend to stress how technologies are appropriated rather than how they change the basis of the world we live in

(e.g. Coleman, 2010; Miller, 2011). Whichever is the case (and I would suggest that this in fact varies for different methods, media and researchers), something is definitely happening that requires us to engage with the advancement of visual methodologies in a new technological context. This book inevitably confronts this question and below I scrutinize this new digital media context in more detail. Some of the chapters of this book also deal with the question of web-based technologies directly, yet in the context of other theoretical and epistemological shifts with which they are implicated. In fact most of the contributors to this book engage with the digital context of visual research, even if not directly, since practitioners and scholars of visual methodologies are for the most part essentially engaged with working in a digital environment. This does not however mean that 'old' media are not advancing in visual research; as we see in other chapters, the manual drawing, crafting and making of images is also moving forward in new ways.

An equally important feature of the contemporary advances in visual methodology is the series of theoretical shifts that in particular characterized the first decade of the 21st century. Theories and philosophies of phenomenology, space and place, practice, the senses and movement have come to the fore across the 'visual' academic disciplines, sub-disciplines and interdisciplines. These approaches, which are often used in ways that are interconnected, are advancing the field of visual methodology by offering theoretical paradigms through which the visual, vision, images and media practices can be reworked. This book is in part structured in response to these moves, with sections that respectively engage with the issues they raise and highlight examples of advances in these areas.

Another increasingly important element of contemporary research is represented in the ways that a growing number of visual researchers are seeking to develop engaged, applied or public research agendas and collaborations. This has always been a feature of my own work, in that I have sought to maintain a balance and importantly a bridge between 'visual' research projects that are theoretical, scholarly and applied. There has been a strand of applied and intervention-based visual research ever since the field developed (see Pink, 2007b) although this might be regarded as a 'hidden' part of its history (Pink, 2006, 2007b), which has only recently been more explicitly recovered. Yet this area is now thriving with a continuous series of new developments (see Pink, 2011c) along with an inspiring enthusiasm for collaborative and participatory filmmaking amongst graduate students.

Visual methodology as a field of scholarship

One of the key developments that proved an inspiration for this book is reflected in what I propose is the emergence of visual methods and visual

methodology as a field of interdisciplinary scholarship and practice. Along with the increasing number of conferences and seminars dedicated to visual methods, and the vast number of other ‘visual’ conferences, workshops, master-classes, seminars and courses that are ongoing around the globe, *Advances in Visual Methodology* stands as a marker of the momentum with which visual methodology as a field in its own right is moving on. Its contributors examine how new practice-based, theoretical and methodological engagements are developing and emerging; the impact they are having on the types of knowledge visual research produces and critiques; the ways these intersect with new media; and the implications of this for social and cultural research, scholarship and intervention. As the different chapters of this book demonstrate, there are different approaches and practices within the field, and in some cases these are also being openly debated (see Pink, 2011a) as visual researchers from one field start to ask why and how it could be that those from another who, on the surface of it, use the same technologies and ask similar questions, could actually be doing something so different.

As an edited volume, *Advances in Visual Methodology* connects with existing and established methods discussions (by covering areas including ethics, visual ethnography, social interaction analysis and virtual ethnography) as well as with newer issues (visual digital and locative media, arts practice and social intervention and possibilities for public scholarship). Yet it also extends the discussion in critical ways that link to theoretical debates (e.g. relating to practice theory, spatial theory and the senses). In doing so it sits alongside and in a constructive relationship to contemporary visual methods texts, such as Luc Pauwels and Eric Margolis’s recent edited volume, *The Sage Handbook of Visual Methods* (2011). However, rather than taking a conventional textbook angle on presenting each approach and its rationale for re-use, *Advances in Visual Methodology* is concerned with critically advancing the debates in the disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas with which its authors engage. Around a decade earlier, Theo van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt edited *The Handbook of Visual Analysis* (2001), which represented the work of a set of visual scholars from across different disciplines. In common with that volume, *Advances in Visual Methodology* is concerned with developments across disciplines. Yet, as part of its agenda, it also accounts for how the field of visual methodology scholarship is moving on.

Given the increasing focus amongst scholars and students on research methodology as a field of interest and research in itself, this book seeks to extend the debates in visual ethics and in visual methods and practices, and expand the field. In developing it, the idea of visual methodologies as routes to knowledge becomes a fundamental way of thinking about what it is we are seeking to do as we use visual methods and media in research. Following on from this, the

question becomes one that considers the different routes through which visual methodologies might take us to new types of knowledge, the ways of knowing that these imply, and the ways in which they are engaged by different groups of people. In doing so I am not seeking to argue for hierarchies of knowledge or to pitch one discipline against another (although I admit I might have done this in other publications). Rather, I see each section of this book as focusing on how the visual becomes a way of arriving at particular types and layers of knowledge or ways of knowing.

This perspective is not about a refusal to take a theoretical stand and argue for it. Instead, it is my concern to permit the question of how visual methodology has by now emerged as a field of academic scholarship to be demonstrated through the chapters written by the contributors. In recent years much has been written about visual methods and methodologies, which crosses disciplines and media practices. It is a field of scholarship that I believe we should see as open and constantly shifting. Scholars who participate in it are united both in their concern for investigating how the visual might enable routes to knowledge and their commitment to innovating through the practical use of constantly changing (audio)visual media in research. In this context their work is influenced not only by theoretical developments but also by the relationship between theoretical and technological fields of study and practice. Therefore this book does not define or crystallise visual methodology at a specific moment in its development. But rather through a focus on *advances* it examines the multiple routes that are developing and the way that they constitute visual methodology as a field of scholarship. I argue that when thinking about visual methodologies we need to be aware of the emergences, intertwinings and points of contact between different approaches, and the implications of these. *Advances in Visual Methodology* invites readers to reflect not just on the past and on present developments, but to think in a more processual way. This is intended moreover to lead us to consider how the methodologies discussed here might take us into the future of our disciplinary and interdisciplinary work through new combinations and the imaginings for future work that it seeks to inspire. Therefore, *Advances in Visual Methodology* is not directly designed to replace or to contest any existing text or paradigm. Rather it seeks to contribute to scholarship in this field by engaging and *advancing with* the existing visual methodology and methods texts that form part of the field of scholarship it participates in. These interlinkages are all the more clear when we consider how the authors or editors of some of the leading edited volumes and single-author books in this field are participating as contributors to this volume, signifying its relevance to existing debates and their advancement. Indeed, in Chapter 14, the final chapter of this book, Luc Pauwels critically reviews the state of visual research, in a call for a continuing series of developments in the future.

Elsewhere I have outlined the (sometimes intersecting) histories of visual anthropology, visual sociology and visual culture studies to trace their significance for a visual ethnography (Pink, 2007a [2001]). I have likewise approached the work of applied visual ethnography and anthropology by arguing that it has a history (Pink, 2006, 2007b). Other authors have equally discussed the historical contexts and debates that frame visual methods in their own fields. I will not repeat the detail of these historical summaries here. It is sufficient to say that disciplinary and cross-disciplinary histories of visual methodology can be seen as providing a trajectory through which contemporary uses of visual methods are informed and also from which they depart. When one begins to trace the use of visual methods over time it also becomes clear that, as theoretical and disciplinary contexts shift, other 'advances' in visual methodology have occurred. Historically it might be argued that there were two key shifts during the 20th century. The first involved the push for visual methods and visual representation during the 1970s and 1980s when these were still highly contested and often marginalised ways of working, accused of being overly subjective. By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, along with the reflexive and postmodern turns in theory and methodology, visual methods had begun to become more accepted and there was an increasing interest in their practice, even though they could not be in any way described as mainstream. Yet by the turn of the century, further changes were underway, along with digital technologies and further theoretical shifts towards a focus on mobility, flows, the senses, spatial theory and practice. These ideas have been pivotal in shaping the advances that are represented in the current visual methodologies represented by the contributors to this book.

The question of defining visual methodology as a field of practice is further complicated by the fact that within it discipline and also task-specific uses and understandings of the visual exist alongside and in relation to visual work that is self-consciously interdisciplinary. By interdisciplinary I mean research that combines the practices, theories and ideas of different disciplines to produce novel outcomes and contributions to knowledge, theory and applied interventions. Yet interdisciplinary practice is not always simple: because visual methods have developed across disciplines it would be impossible to say they have one single common heritage, or aim. Indeed it is often their shared focus on the visual that can be seen as a common factor with their variable assessments of the status of visual images, such as, for example, documentary film, art, research footage, data, or materials for content analysis. A review of some of the (increasingly vast) existing literature gives a sense of the patterns of discipline-specific and interdisciplinary works that have emerged.

For example, some existing volumes have tended to be identified according to discipline – focusing on a visual sociology (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004) or visual anthropology (Banks and Morphy, 1997; Banks and Ruby, 2011; Pink,

2006; Pink et al., 2004). Others have brought together different disciplines and practices to represent a range of visual methods in edited volumes (e.g. Prosser 1998, van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001). Some authored books have proposed visual methodologies in ways that need not be discipline specific (e.g. Banks, 2001; Heath et al., 2010; Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2007a [2001]; Rose, 2010 [2000]) but nevertheless advance different theoretical and epistemological standpoints. Other moves have brought together disciplines or practices in specific ways. For example, Arnd Schneider and Chris Wright's two groundbreaking books bring together anthropology and arts practice (2006, 2010) and other work specifically attends to the relationship between visual methods, social intervention and/or participatory research (Mitchell, 2011; Pink, 2007b). These developments in the relationship between social-science research practice and visual media have also been accompanied by a stream of literature that focuses on the theory and practice of ethnographic film (including, for example, the work of Crawford and Turton, 1991; El Guindi, 2004; MacDougall, 1998, 2005; Ruby, 2000). The ethical, practical and epistemological foundations of ethnographic filmmaking have historically been (and often still are) quite different from those of other uses of visual methods in the social sciences. Yet as a field of practice and theory, ethnographic filmmaking has had an undeniably important influence on the development of visual methodology as a field of scholarship.

Therefore, as a field of scholarship, visual methodology is complex and diverse. Its uniting themes tend to be the focus on the (audio)visual; the media and technologies engaged; and attention to a specific range of ethical issues. There are sometimes vast differences in terms of the ways that the status of the image is understood, and the theoretical and discipline-specific foundations that distinguish some approaches to the visual in research methodology. Part 5 of this book focuses specifically on interdisciplinarity. The first two chapters in this part show that there is no single rule for working with the visual across disciplines. As Marcus Banks demonstrates in Chapter 12, in some cases it is not appropriate to borrow methods from other disciplines. Instead, sometimes one needs to dig deeper into the resources of one's own disciplinary practices and perspectives to find a methodological solution. In contrast, in Chapter 13, Susan Hogan and I discuss a productive relationship between feminist art therapy and visual ethnography methods by identifying theoretical and practical coherences between these two disciplines which are not often mutually engaged. Yet, as I outline in the next section, recently a series of theoretical themes and practical issues that have swept across the social sciences and humanities have also been highly influential in ways that imply their common impact across the 'visual' disciplines. This offers ways both of theming the visual methodologies discussed in this book and of potentially creating stronger connections between disciplines.

Changing thought: theoretical turns and visual methodologies

Theoretical developments, debates, ‘turns’ and critiques form part of the ongoing flow of academic practice. Their developments frame the routes that scholarship and analysis take, and they also have important implications for methodological developments. In my own view it is crucial that theoretical coherence should be achieved throughout a project. By this I mean that the methodological approach should be informed by the same theoretical commitments that underpin any analysis of culture, society, persons or materialities produced through qualitative research. For example, in my book *Situating Everyday Life: Practices and Places* (Pink, 2012), I seek to achieve this continuity. Here, in the present volume, we also see that theoretical shifts in recent years have been implicated in the production of new types of analysis and subjects for research but also of ‘innovative’ research methods, and openness to ‘new’ ways of doing visual research of which digital and visual media are a part. Indeed, as I argue below, it has often recently been the case that digital media can inspire us to rethink theoretical paradigms in ways that have implications for the way we also understand ‘old’ media (Pink, 2011b). Yet there are also a series of broader theoretical shifts that are having a noticeable impact on not only visual methodologies, but more widely on both the research questions that are being asked and the way researchers go about trying to answer them. Interestingly, because more generally visual and digital media are tending to be increasingly integrated into a number of research methods and approaches, it would be easy to see visual methods as specifically implicated in these changes. While this might or might not be the case, we can be certain that they are having an impact on the way visual methods are engaged.

In *Advances in Visual Methodology* these theoretical shifts are treated in two different ways. First, in the following two parts of the book, contributors focus on what might be seen as two of the central theoretical strands of our time: practice and spatial theory. While neither of these paradigms are by any means new, they have recently come to occupy a level of importance in the social sciences and humanities that goes beyond disciplinary boundaries to inform the way scholars have formulated their research questions, understood their research practices and analysed their findings. There by no means exist standard and commonly agreed-on theories of practice, place or space – and indeed the terms have tended to be used in ways that are even sometimes contradictory, ranging between the descriptive and the abstract and so forth (see Pink, 2012, for a discussion of this). However, in recent scholarship they have been employed in an increasingly coherent way to offer understandings of both research practices and findings. In Parts 2 and 3 of this book respectively,

contributors consider on the one hand, practice, and on the other, place and space. Collectively the authors of these chapters invite novel perspectives in both systematically addressing these theoretical strands through their visual research, and conceptualising their visual research methods through these theoretical paradigms.

While what have been called the ‘practice turn’ (Schatzki et al., 2001) and the ‘spatial turn’ (Hubbard et al., 2004) are addressed through groupings of chapters, the questions they raise endure throughout the book. For example, the idea of visual research itself as practice is developed particularly by Lydia Martens (Chapter 3), Jon Hindmarsh and Dylan Tutt (Chapter 4) and Elisenda Ardévol (Chapter 5). These contributors were invited to discuss the implications of the ‘practice turn’ for visual methodologies, in part due to their expertise in the study of practices themselves. Yet it is perhaps not surprising that they have turned their analytical gaze not only to the question of how visual researchers are analysing other people’s practices in novel ways, but also to the very practice of visual research methods. This interest in research itself as practice is reflected across the volume, and clearly with a greater or lesser degree of emphasis it is often precisely practices that visual researchers study. The focus on practices and spatial theory is moreover inextricable from two other theoretical ‘turns’ or themes that are fundamental to contemporary thought about the visual and the way we do research – the senses and the focus on mobilities and movement.

What is often now referred to as a ‘sensory turn’ has had a profound impact on the way visual research is currently conceptualised. This has brought about a rethinking of visual culture studies with an acknowledgement of the relationship between the visual and the other senses. While developed explicitly in Elizabeth Edwards and Kaushik Bhaumik’s (2009) *The Visual Sense*, this shift was already being acknowledged in earlier writings in the 21st century. A multi-sensory approach (Pink, 2009) has also played a key role in our understandings of anthropological film, rooted in the work of David MacDougall (1998, 2005), and is becoming a strand in the teaching and practice of visual anthropology. The re-situating of the visual in relation to the other senses has a series of implications for visual researchers. But, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Pink, 2009), it does not imply that a focus on the visual is no longer relevant. Rather it demonstrates that we need to rethink how the visual and its relationality to other sensory categories come into play in the ways that we create routes to knowledge in our research processes. As some of the contributors to this volume show, an appreciation of the senses has become increasingly integrated into the methodological frameworks that inform visual research. Therefore Cristina Grasseni (Chapter 6) writes of ‘sensescapes’ when discussing community mapping; Elisenda Ardévol’s (Chapter 5) and my own

(Chapter 7) chapters remind us of the sensory dimensions of visual Internet research; and Christina Lammer (Chapter 10) discusses the use of her own body as 'a sensory research instrument'.

Movement and mobility are likewise increasingly popular questions for social research and in the practice of research. This has been no less so in the development of visual research methods. These themes become particularly pertinent in the chapters of the book that focus on digital technologies in visual research. For example, in Chapters 5 and 8 respectively, Elisenda Ardévol and Francesco Lapenta bring our attention to the potential of mobile and locative media and in Chapter 7 I suggest that movement is a useful metaphor through which to understand our experiences of digital ethnographic places.

Changing media: digital technologies and methodological reflection

Developments in digital, mobile and locative media inspire both new theoretical and practical engagements in the methodological process. Collectively, the contributors to this volume reinforce this point, and some chapters specifically address this issue. Digital media have inspired advances in research, media and arts practices, which create new routes to knowledge and its representation, and new ways for audiences to engage with visual research. Simultaneously, however, it becomes clear that existing theoretical frameworks that have been used to understand media practices and processes do not always accommodate the new types of digital, social, spatial and mobile encounters in which contemporary visual researchers become implicated. This demands that we develop advances in the ways we understand both the phenomena that we are researching *and* our positioning as researchers within these complex social-technological-environmental contexts. Significantly, these advances in practice and theory are not only relevant to understanding new ways of doing visual research in a digital era. They also enable us to rethink the ways in which media(ted) research and the ethnographic encounter is understood more widely. Thus they constitute part of wider theoretical advances with the arts and social sciences. In this sense, the work of these contributors shows that scholarship around visual/digital methodology is not simply an isolated field that is aimed at the development of new research methods, but that it is just as likely to produce theoretical insights that are relevant to mainstream academic scholarship. Such works indeed suggest that the importance of achieving theoretical and methodological coherence is not only a one-way process of ensuring that we understand the methods we use with the same theories with which we understand our findings. Rather, it means that we might understand our research findings through

theoretical frameworks developed in relation to the knowledge processes that are part of our methodological advances. Examples of such revisions in relation to technological changes are evident across this volume even when the chapters concerned are not directly 'about' the Internet. For instance, in Chapter 6, while her main focus is on community mapping, Cristina Grasseni shows how choosing a specific means of multimedia representation is a key step in the research process. With a more specific focus on visual Internet research Elisenda Ardévol points out in Chapter 5 how a visual/virtual ethnography creates new challenges for the researcher. In Chapter 7, I discuss how new visual ethnography environments that span Internet and face-to-face relations demand alternative non-locality-based theoretical framings, as does Francesco Lapenta in Chapter 8, through his discussion of the implications of the development of what he calls 'geomedia'. Similarly, in Chapter 11, Rod Coover argues that 'digital technologies have altered fundamental theories about how documentary images work and how to work with them'. Our experiences of new technologies are therefore encouraging us to think in new ways theoretically which in turn reflect back on how we theorise old media and on how we engage with media as researchers.

Changing the world: public and applied visual methodologies

Visual methodologies are used across a wide range of research contexts. I have stressed the interdisciplinarity of this field of scholarship and this is explored more fully in the final section of this book. Yet its boundary crossing does not stop in the way it fluidly associates itself with a range of different disciplines, albeit in different ways. Visual methodologies also create important bridges between what were in the past the rather separate worlds of academic social-science scholarship on the one hand, and on the other, the domains of applied and public research and of arts practice. These contexts, all of which engage the (audio)visual for research and communication about the works that are produced in them, are becoming increasingly interwoven in a contemporary context. Part 3 of this book looks at how research that engages with both the social sciences and the arts, and is intended to take on a public or applied profile, is pushing forward new advances in visual methodology. This raises a number of significant questions, including the issue of how such methodological advances made in the contexts of digital arts, documentary or participatory arts programmes might be seen as impacting on visual methodology as a field of scholarship. As recent works show, such as my own edited volume focusing on applied visual anthropology (Pink, 2007b) and Schneider and Wright's two

edited texts exploring the connections between anthropology and art (2005, 2010), these are not entirely new combinations. Yet brought together we can see how social science, art and intervention invite new ways of thinking about how we might do visual research; how we might engage participants and publics in the processes of research and in the dissemination of such work; how in a digital context this invites new ideas and new practices; and thus what advances in visual methodology this brings.

The chapters in Part 4 directly approach this question. Maggie O'Neill (Chapter 9) and Christina Lammer (Chapter 10) both bring social science and visual and arts practice together to create works that are applied, public and scholarly, and Rod Coover (Chapter 11) brings us the collaborative methodology of writing in conversation to discuss new practices in non-fiction image-making with digital tools. Yet the themes of this part are not bounded, and both the application of visual methods outside academia and questions of their politicisation resurface across the volume. Lydia Martens (Chapter 3) discusses the politics of looking and policy debates about hygiene and nutrition; Cristina Grasseni's (Chapter 6) work with community mapping was an applied anthropology project developed with an ecomuseum; Jon Hindmarsh and Dylan Tutt (Chapter 4) discuss video analysis methods that are used in academic and applied work; and Susan Hogan and I (Chapter 13) discuss art therapy practice. Thus demonstrating a range of contexts where applied and scholarly research fields are bridged in contexts of interdisciplinarity.

Futures

This volume sets out a carefully selected set of critical and contemporary advances in visual methodology that are not only pushing forward the field of visual and generally qualitative research practice, but also offering new routes to knowledge that also have wider implications for scholarly and applied practice. I urge readers to engage with them as sources for thinking with and through the social, and as ways of participating in understanding the world and also as a set of practices that could lead to a range of new and equally innovative future scholarly, applied and public interventions. The future is not in this book, but in what we do with the ideas that its contributors propose.

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