

The Visual in Ethnography: Photography, Video, Cultures and Individuals

Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations (see Pink 1997a: 3), our imagination and our dreams (Edgar 2004). They are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, space and truth. Ethnographic research is likewise intertwined with visual images and metaphors. When ethnographers produce photographs or video, these visual texts, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic knowledge. Just as images inspire conversations, conversation may invoke images; conversation visualizes and draws absent printed or electronic images into its narratives through verbal descriptions and references to them. In ethnography images are as inevitable as sounds, smells, textures and tastes, words or any other aspect of culture and society. Although ethnographers should not be obliged to make the visual *central* to their work (see Morphy and Banks 1997: 14), they might explore its relation to other senses and discourses (see Pink 2005).

The visual has recently received much critical attention from scholars of the social sciences and humanities. It is now commonly recognized that, as Peter Crawford (1992: 66) recommended, notions of 'pure image' and 'pure word' are not viable. Instead we need to attend to the constructedness of this distinction. In this sense, even the term 'visual research methods' (see Banks n.d.) that refers to uses of visual technologies and images in research, places an undue stress on the visual. 'Visual research methods' are not purely visual. Rather, they pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture. Similarly, they cannot be used independently of other methods; neither a purely visual ethnography nor an exclusively visual approach to culture can exist. [This chapter focuses on this interlinking of the visual with ethnography, culture and individuals.]

Ethnography and ethnographic images

What is ethnography? How does one 'do' ethnography? What makes a text, photograph or video ethnographic? (Handbooks of 'traditional' research methods tend to represent ethnography as a mixture of participant observation and interviewing.) For example, Martin Hammersley and Paul Atkinson defined ethnography as 'a particular method or set of methods' that:

involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions - in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research. (1995: 1)

Such descriptions are limited on two counts. First, they restrict the range of things ethnographers may actually do. Secondly, their representation of ethnography as just another method or set of methods of data collection wrongly assumes that ethnography entails a simple process of going to another place or culture, staying there for a period of time, collecting pieces of information and knowledge and then taking them home intact.

Instead, I shall define ethnography as a methodology (see Crotty 1998: 7); as an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. Rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer versions of ethnographers' experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. This may entail reflexive, collaborative or participatory methods. It may involve informants in a variety of ways at different points of the research and representational stages of the project. It should account not only for the observable, recordable realities that may be translated into written notes and texts, but also for objects, visual images, the immaterial and the sensory nature of human experience and knowledge. Finally, it should engage with issues of representation that question the right of the researcher to represent other people, recognize the impossibility of 'knowing other minds' (Fernandez 1995: 25) and acknowledge that the sense we make of informants' words and actions is 'an expression of our own consciousness' (Cohen and Rapport 1995: 12).

There is, likewise, no simple answer or definition of what it is that makes an activity, image, text, idea, or piece of knowledge ethnographic. No single action, artifact or representation is essentially, in

itself, ethnographic, but will be defined as such through interpretation and context. Anthropologists have noted the absence of concrete boundaries between ethnographic and fictional texts (see Clifford and Marcus 1986), and between ethnographic, documentary and fictional film (see Loizos 1993: 7-8). Similarly, there is no clear-cut way of defining an individual photograph as, for example, a tourist, documentary or journalistic photograph (see Chapter 3), or of deciding whether a piece of video footage is a home movie or ethnographic video (see Chapter 4). The same applies to the arbitrary nature of our distinctions between personal experience and ethnographic experience, autobiography and anthropology (see Okley and Callaway 1992; Okley 1996) and fieldwork and everyday life (Pink 1999a). Any experience, action, artifact, image or idea is never definitively *just one thing* but may be redefined differently in different situations, by different individuals and in terms of different discourses. It is impossible to measure the ethnographicness of an image in terms of its form, content or potential as an observational document, visual record or piece of data. Instead, the ethnographicness of any image or representation is contingent on how it is situated, interpreted and used to invoke meanings and knowledge that are of ethnographic interest.

Reflexivity and subjectivity

In their critique of natural science approaches, authors of traditional research methods texts emphasized the constructedness of ethnographic knowledge (e.g. Burgess 1984; Ellen 1984), usually coupled with a stress on the central importance of reflexivity (see also Fortier 1998; Walsh 1998). A reflexive approach recognizes the centrality of the subjectivity of the researcher to the production and representation of ethnographic knowledge. Reflexivity goes beyond the researcher's concern with questions of 'bias' or how ethnographers observe the 'reality' of a society they actually 'distort' through their participation in it. Moreover, reflexivity is not simply a mechanism that neutralizes ethnographers' subjectivity as collectors of data through an engagement with how their presence may have affected the reality observed and the data collected. Indeed, the assumption that a reflexive approach will aid ethnographers to produce objective data represents only a token and cosmetic engagement with reflexivity that wrongly supposes subjectivity could (or should) be avoided or eradicated. Instead, subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation.

At the end of the twentieth century postmodern thinkers argued that ethnographic knowledge and text can only ever be a subjective construction, a 'fiction' that represents only the ethnographer's version of a reality, rather than an empirical truth. Some proposed such

approaches take reflexivity too far. For instance, David Walsh insisted the 'social and cultural world must be the ground and reference for ethnographic writing', that 'reflexive ethnography should involve a keen awareness of the interpenetration of reality and representation' and that researchers should not 'abandon all forms of realism as the basis for doing ethnography' (1998: 220). His argument presents a tempting and balanced way of thinking about the experienced reality people live in and the texts that ethnographers construct to represent this reality. Nevertheless, it is also important to keep in mind the centrality of the subjectivity of the researcher to the production of ethnographic knowledge. Anthony Cohen and Nigel Rapport's point that 'our understandings of what informants say or do is solely 'an expression of our own consciousness'' (see above), problematizes Walsh's proposition. If the researcher is the channel through which all ethnographic knowledge is produced and represented, then the only way reality and representation can interpenetrate in ethnographic work is through the ethnographer's textual constructions of 'ethnographic fictions'. Rather than existing objectively and being accessible and recordable through scientific research methods, reality is subjective and is known only as it is experienced by individuals. By focusing on how ethnographic knowledge about how individuals experience reality is produced, through the intersubjectivity between researchers and their research contexts, we may arrive at a closer understanding of the worlds that other people live in. It is not solely the subjectivity of the researcher that may shade his or her understanding of reality, but the relationship between the subjectivities of researcher and informants that produces a negotiated version of reality (see, for example, Fortier 1998).

In relation to this, researchers should maintain an awareness of how different elements of their identities become significant during research. For example, gender, age, ethnicity, class and race are important to how researchers are situated and situate themselves in ethnographic contexts. Ethnographers ought to be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to informants and they ought to consider how their identities are constructed and understood by the people with whom they work. These subjective understandings will have implications for the knowledge that is produced from the ethnographic encounter between researcher and informants. In some fieldwork locations where photography and video are prohibitively costly for most local people, their use in research needs to be situated in terms of the wider economic context as well as questions of how the ethnographer's own identity as a researcher is constructed by her or his informants. Similarly, as I describe in Chapter 3, during my fieldwork in southern Spain, being 'a woman with a camera' was a significant aspect of my gendered identity as a researcher (see Pink 1999b). Gendered and economic power relations implied in and by images and image production

have an inevitable influence on how visual images and technologies can be used in ethnographic research.

Reflexivity has been a key theme of the new visual methods literature that has emerged since the beginning of the twenty first century. It has been advocated strongly (although in slightly differing ways) in single author books (e.g. Ruby 2000a; Banks 2001; Rose 2001; and see Pink 2005: ch. 2 for a full review of this) and a number of good edited volumes containing case studies that demonstrate how contemporary researchers are reflecting on their visual methods in *practice* in visual anthropology (Edgar 2004; Grimshaw and Ravetz 2004; Pink et al. 2004; Schneider and Wright 2005) and visual sociology (Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pole 2004). This period of methodological reflection, clearly informed by the postmodern turn of the 1980s and 1990s, has characterized not only the visual methods literature, but also qualitative research literature more generally.

Gendered identities, technologies and images

In the 1990s gender became a central theme in discussions of ethnographic research methodology. This included a focus on the gendered identity of the researcher, the intersubjectivity of the gendered negotiations that ethnographers have with their informants, the sensuous, sexualized and erotic aspects of fieldwork and the gendered nature of the ethnographic research process, or of the 'ethnographic narrative' (see especially Bell et al. 1993; Kulick and Willson 1995). A consideration of gender and other aspects of identity also has implications for ethnographic research with images.

Developments that took place in gender theory during the 1980s and 1990s have had an important impact on ethnographic methodology. A stress on the plural, rather than binary, nature of gendered identities and thus on *multiple femininities and masculinities* (see, for example, Connell 1987, 1995; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Moore 1994) has meant that differences *among* as well as *between* men and women are accounted for. Moreover, the fixity of both gender and identity have been questioned as researchers and theorists have begun to explore how the same individual may both experience and represent his or her masculinity or femininity differently in different contexts and in relation to different people (see Pink 1997a). It has been argued that the gendered self is never fully defined in any absolute way, but that it is only in specific social interactions that the gender identity of any individual comes into being *in relation to* the negotiations that it undertakes with other individuals. In this sense, as Kulick (1995: 29) has summarized, the gendered self is only ever completed in relation to other selves, subjectivities, discourses, representations or material objects. If we apply this to the

fieldwork context, [it implies that precisely how both researcher and informant experience themselves and one another as gendered individuals will depend on the specific negotiation into which they enter. If visual images and technologies are part of the research project, they will play a role in how both researcher and informant identities are constructed and interpreted.] As part of most contemporary cultures, photography, video and other media also form part of the broader context in which researcher and informant identities are situated.]

An understanding of gender relations as relations of power and a concurrent gendering of power relations has been developed in existing literatures on visual image production, representation and ethnographic research. In some instances gendered power relations become an explicit aspect of fieldwork experience. Deborah Barndt demonstrates this through a memorable example: 'Ever since that moment in 1969 when I took my first people picture and got threatened by my subject/victim (who in self-defense, wielded over me the butcher knife she had been using to carve her toe nails), I have understood that [the act of photography is imbued with issues of power]' (Barndt 1997: 9). In another project, photographing the staff of a sociology department, Barndt found also that the gendered and hierarchical power relations within the department corresponded with the access she had to different people:

It seemed much harder to get into the space of the powerful than into the space of the less powerful: the (primarily female) secretaries in the departmental office were easier prey, for example, than the (usually male) full professors; you had to pass through two doors and get their permission before you could photograph them. (1997: 13)

[An understanding of the intersection between image production, image-producing technologies and the ethnic, racial, gendered and other elements of the identities of those who use or own them is crucial for a reflexive approach.] In more abstract discussions it has been argued that the modern or 'conventional' ethnographic research process itself constitutes a masculine pursuit that oppresses a feminine approach to knowledge. Don Kulick has likened the traditional narrative structure of ethnography to an exploitative and repressive act where the masculine ethnographer penetrates the feminized 'field' generalizing, abstracting and oppressing the 'feminine' objects of his study. He has argued for a different (and more feminine) approach to ethnography that focuses on negotiation and intersubjectivity (Kulick 1995). This perspective thus develops a model of masculinity as exploitative and repressive. This does not mean that all types of masculinity are always repressive or exploitative; in everyday life and experience many different types of masculinity exist (see Connell 1995). Rather, the abstracted models of feminine and masculine approaches to ethnography are important in that they stand as metaphors for particular approaches to ethics, epistemology and subjectivity.

These gendered models of ethnography as masculine, exploitative, observational and objectifying or feminine, subjective, sensuous, negotiating and reflexive have parallels in film studies and photography. In particular, [notions of the gendered gaze, as developed by Laura Mulvey (1989) in film studies, and of the archive developed by Alan Sekula (1989) in photography, have suggested that women, or the less powerful, are oppressed by an objectifying masculine gaze that is implied by the way they are represented visually in both film and photography.] Borrowed originally from Michel Foucault, these ideas have been re-appropriated to discuss visual representations in other cultures (e.g. Pinney 1992) and historically in western culture. For example, studies of colonial photography have characterized the 'colonial gaze' on other less powerful cultures as an exploitative and objectifying project to catalogue and classify the colonized (see Edwards 1992, 1997b). As a response to this, [feminist approaches to the production of ethnographic knowledge and of ethnographic images and the uses of technology have been developed in Chaplin's work with photography (1994) and Thomas's research with video] (1997). As well as video-recording dancers in rehearsals and performances which they too scrutinized, in a group interview Thomas moved to the other side of the camera so that 'the researcher would also be put into the "actual" research frame under the gaze of the camera' (Thomas 1997: 146). This informed how power relations were structured within the group and in particular between Thomas and the group members, with the camera as a democratizing technology, breaking down one dimension of the research/researched distinction by 'observing' the researcher along with her informants. Other research methods that have been used to 'reinscribe the power relations of fieldwork' include giving respondents video cameras with which to make their own video diaries (Holliday 2004).

Doing ethnography in contemporary contexts

The themes of reflexivity and subjectivity discussed above have certainly shaped contemporary ethnographic methodologies. However, [today's research practices are also influenced by the specific political, technological and material contexts in which ethnographers work as well as new understandings of what might constitute an ethnographic 'field'.] These situations mean that [research now often becomes multisited, new relationships and ethical and personal responsibilities come to the fore and ethnographic narratives are contingent on these variables] rather than following the conventional structure that, as I noted above, has been criticized from a feminist perspective. Ethical questions are covered in Chapter 3. [Here I reflect on the nature of contemporary fieldwork contexts by way of examples that reveal how multisitedness, political contexts and technological and experiential factors also impinge on the

spaces of ethnography.) The four areas singled out for discussion below do not constitute an exhaustive list of contemporary fieldwork contexts – that in itself would require a whole book. Rather, I have selected four scenarios of contemporary research. These contexts are followed up in the case studies discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 where I examine in more detail how visual methods have been used in them.

1) First, an increasing amount of fieldwork is now being carried out inside the domestic interior, which is a domain of interdisciplinary interest. In these studies fieldwork is usually spread between individuals or groups living in their different homes. Academics working in, for example, social anthropology (e.g. Miller 2001; Pink 2004b), sociology (a Silva 2000) and cultural geography, and applied social scientists working for industry all carry out fieldwork in the home. When doing ethnographic research in intimate contexts like the home the use of visual media and methods creates new ethical and practical dilemmas as the camera enters personal domains that might not normally be the object of public scrutiny. At the same time it offers great opportunities to create data archives that reveal the detail of everyday experience and practice, and encourage people to use their homes as a material and sensory prompt through which to talk about their self-identities and experiences. Visual methods can be especially pertinent in investigating embodied experiences and materiality of the home (Pink 2004b, 2005) and homelessness (Radley et al. 2005). As the extract from Alan Radley et al.'s research in Figure 1.1 shows, photography can inspire people to represent and then articulate embodied and material experiences that they do not usually recall in verbal interviewing. More generally, visual explorations produce useful data for understanding how people experience their social and material environments, be this urban transport systems (e.g. Patton 2004) or a children's playground (Loescher 2004), and for representing how 'social processes are objectified in material objects' (MacDougall 2005: 240).

2) Secondly, contemporary ethnographers also need to account for the mobility of their informants. As Vered Amit has pointed out, 'the people whom they [ethnographers] are trying to study are increasingly likely to be as mobile if not more so than the ethnographers trying to keep up with them' (2000: 12). Research projects might cross short distances or national boundaries as informants move according to their own circumstances. Our studies thus might include the new political and economic contexts that economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers find themselves in and their strategies for coping with these.

3) Thirdly, Christine Hine's book *Virtual Ethnography* outlines an approach to doing ethnographic research on-line: where the 'field' is located in electronic space, on the internet (2000). This has been followed by a number of interesting ethnographic studies of, for instance, on-line social practices and relationships. For example, Elisenda Ardevol's ethnographic study on a dating website inevitably includes analysis of both written and photographic representations of self (see Ardevol 2005). In other cases fieldwork



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Figure 1.1

As part of a study of homelessness in Britain, Alan Radley, Darrin Hodgetts and Andrea Cullen asked research participants to photograph their everyday experiences of being a homeless person. Jean, who had been homeless for more than twenty years, took the photograph below and afterwards discussed it in interview with the researchers. Radley et al. write:

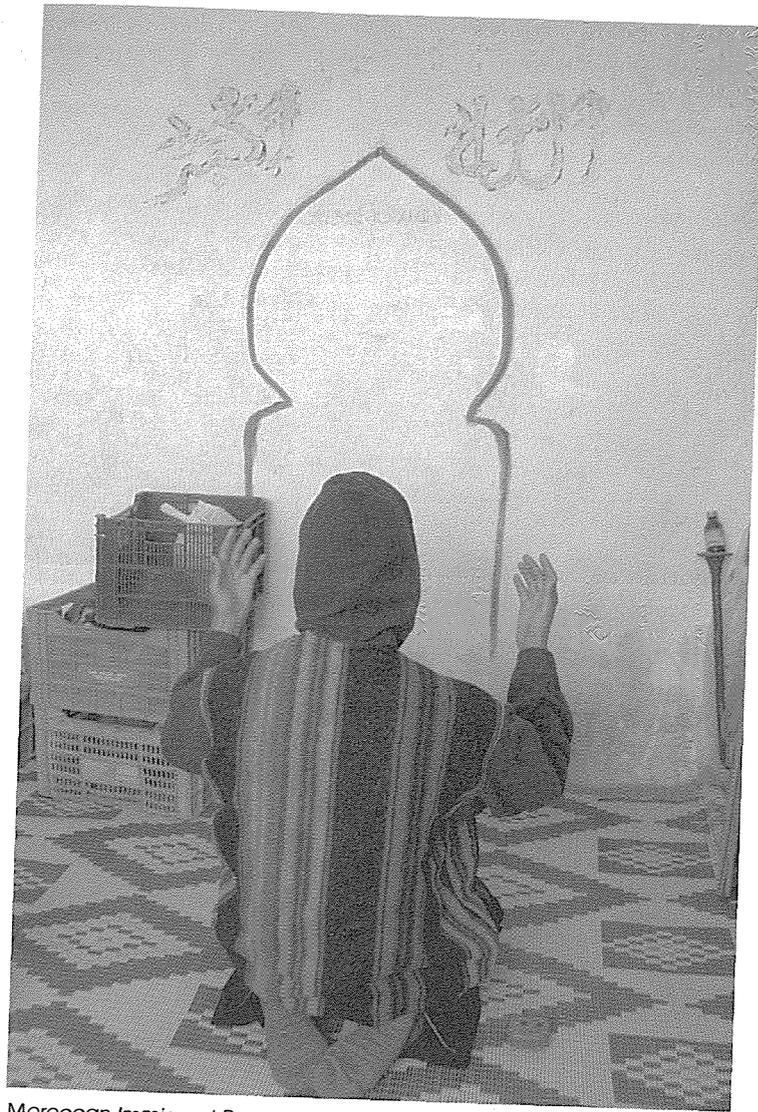
She described this photograph as follows:

That's opposite the step where I used to sleep. These cardboard bits. I took a photograph of the cardboard bits because we use these cardboard bits and we flatten them out along the steps to sleep on so, soft you know it covers the concrete and the wet and the damp and everything so. You know we rely very much on the cardboard being left out for sleeping on. You know that it is important that we have cardboard. Other than that we have to go out and put big newspapers if there's no cardboard around.

Detailed descriptions of sleeping rough were relatively rare among the participants' responses. However, Jean felt it was important to communicate the sense of degradation that sleeping rough involves. Perhaps for that reason, many of her pictures centred upon litter and rubbish bins, as well as doorways and steps on which she had to sleep. About the last, she complained, was the annoying habit that people have of pissing on them, something that can be interpreted as a metaphor of displacement, of the object situation in which rough sleepers find themselves ... She returned to the matter of cardboard later on in the interview when she spoke of homeless people building 'little cardboard houses around them at night' so that, as she said,

You know, that cardboard is so close to you, it could almost be a person and there's lots of times that homeless people have been considered a piece of cardboard themselves. We've often been called 'cardboard people'.

(Radley et al. 2005: 289–90)



Moroccan Immigrant Praying, Barranquete, Almería, January 2004.
© John Perivolaris 2004

Figure 1.2

Migration and movement is part of the context in which contemporary ethnographers work. John Perivolaris's photographic project *Migrados* focuses on narratives of migration to Spain. The man photographed here collaborated with Perivolaris as his guide and host, showing him what it was important for him to photograph (Perivolaris 2005, personal communication). See an on-line exhibition and discussion of this work at www.flickr.com/photos/dr_john2005/.

might be split between face-to-face social relationships in one locality and other contexts where the same people meet on-line in internet discussions, lists or forums. In many contemporary research projects ethnographers are finding that their informants' everyday relationships have an on-line component, this might mean not simply the exchange of e-mail but also of digital photography, the construction of websites or using on-line forums (e.g. Postill 2005). Such on-line contexts are likely to be composed of a combination of photographic and written elements, not to mention the iconography of on-line communication (see Ardevol 2003; Trias i Valls 2003).

Finally, researchers are increasingly attending to the idea of the human imagination and dreams as a site of ethnographic fieldwork. Visual methodologies have a key role to play in this research space. Of particular interest is Iain Edgar's approach to accessing and analysing the images that are produced through our imaginations and dreams. His imagework and dreamwork methods are similar since 'both refer to the mind's spontaneous production of imagery that people may consider "good to think with"' (2004: 10). However, as Edgar points out, although imagework is itself largely non-verbal, it tends to produce verbal narratives about intangible images (although in some scenarios informants produce visual representations of their dreams or imaginations – see for example Orobítg 2004), which form the materials that the researcher then analyses.

As these examples suggest, contemporary 'new' fieldwork domains are saturated with visual images. Indeed, as the ethnography shows, researchers working in these contexts are increasingly likely to be using visual images and media as part of their practices of research and representation.

Unobservable ethnography and visual culture

In the Introduction I described the realist view of visual technologies as tools for creating visual records. This view persists in some social science research methods textbooks. For example, Uwe Flick has referred to 'the use of visual media for research purposes' as 'second-hand observation' (1998: 151). While this may prove a useful means of undertaking some forms of social research, this 'observational' approach depends on the problematic assumption that reality is visible, observable and recordable in video or photography. However, as writers such as Johannes Fabian (1983) suggested, the epistemological and ethical principles of the observational approach should be rethought. In particular two issues need to be addressed. First, is it possible to observe and record 'reality'? For instance, just because something appears to be

visible, this does not necessarily mean it is true. [Secondly, the observational approach implies that we can observe and extract objective information (data) about our informants. This can be problematized as an 'objectifying' approach that does research *on* but not *with* people.]

[The relationship between the visual, the visible and reality has been explored in cultural studies as well as anthropology.] As Chris Jenks argued, while material objects inevitably have a visual presence, the notion of 'visual culture' should not refer only to the material and observable, 'visible' aspects of culture (Jenks 1995: 16). Rather, the visual also forms part of human imaginations and conversations (Edgar 2004; Orobittg 2004). As Ivo Strecker has emphasized, images play a central role in the human mind and in human discourse which is 'metaphorically grounded' (Tyler 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, quoted in Strecker 1997). The material and visual cultures that we encounter when we do ethnographic fieldwork may therefore be understood from this perspective: [material objects are unavoidably visual, but visual images are not, by definition, material.] Nevertheless, the intangibility of an image that exists as verbal description or is imagined makes it no less real. This approach to images presents a direct challenge to definitions of 'the real in terms of the material, which can be accessed through the visible' (Slater 1995: 221). This rupture between visibility and reality is significant for an ethnographic approach to the visual because it implies that [reality cannot necessarily be observed visually.] Therefore, [rather than recording reality on video tape or camera film, the most one can expect is to represent those aspects of experience that are visible, or that the person being represented/representing themselves seeks to visualize or make visible.] Moreover, these visible elements of experience will be given different meanings as different people use their own subjective knowledge to interpret them.

[Strecker criticized existing treatments of images in ethnography by pointing out that ethnographers have tended to 'stand between' their informants and audiences/readers by translating images into words.] In doing so ethnographers would impose one (their own) interpretation on the images, thus [dismissing the possibility that the images may have more than one potential meaning.] Instead, [he proposed that since ethnography is 'largely to do with the interpretation of images' it should pay greater attention to 'the rhetorical contexts in which they are embedded' (Strecker 1997: 217). This theme is taken up again in the following chapters as I consider how visual images are given new meanings in a range of different contexts.] Just as reality is not solely visible or observable, [images have no fixed or single meanings and are not capable of capturing an objective reality.] The most one can expect is that observation and images will allow one only to interpret that which is visible and the other elements of experience that are evoked through this.

[Photography and video do nevertheless bear some relationship to 'reality'.] The connection between visual images and experienced reality is

constructed [through individual subjectivity and interpretation of images.] As Terence Wright pointed out, this may be because '[a]s products of a particular culture, they [in this case photographs] are only perceived as real by cultural convention: they only *appear* realistic because we have been taught to see them as such' (Wright 1999: 6; original italics). As ethnographers, we may suspend a belief in reality as an objective and observable experience, but we should also keep in mind that we too use images to refer to certain versions of reality and we treat images as referents of visible and observable phenomena: 'As Alan Sekula (1982: 86) has pointed out, it is the most natural thing in the world for someone to open their [*sic*] wallet and produce a photograph saying "this is my dog"' (Wright 1999: 2). Such realist approaches to photography and video are embedded in the experience and everyday practices of most ethnographers. Indeed, as I argue later in this book, in some cases realist uses of photographic and video images may be appropriate in ethnographic research and representation. However, [realist uses of the visual in ethnography should be qualified by a reflexive awareness of the intentions behind such uses and their limits as regards the representation of truth.]

Images, technologies, individuals

Photography and video have been appropriated in varying forms and degrees by many individuals in almost all cultures and societies. However, [visual images and technologies are not only elements of the cultures that academics study, they also pertain to the academic cultures and personal lifestyles and subject positions from which contemporary ethnographers approach their projects.] As Chaplin has argued for sociology, ethnographic disciplines should not distance themselves from the topics they study (1994: 16). This means thinking not simply of 'the sociology of visual representation' but of sociology *and* visual representations as elements of the same cultural context. Thus [ethnographers should treat visual representation as an aspect of the material culture and practice of social scientists as well as a practice and material culture that is researched by social scientists.]

Most ethnographers, and an increasing number of informants (depending on the fieldwork context), own or have some access to still and video cameras. The inevitable interlinking between personal and professional understandings, agendas and intentions means [that ethnographers' professional approaches to visual images and technologies cannot essentially be separated from their personal approaches and a reflexive approach to one's own visual practices is important for ethnographic and artistic work.] Rather than there being a single corporate ethnographic approach that all ethnographers take on, the practices of individual ethnographers are attached to a combination of personal and professional elements. Anthropologists (e.g. Kulick and Willson 1995;

Okely 1996; Okely and Callaway 1992) have stressed the inseparability of personal from professional identities and the importance of autobiography and personal experience in the production of ethnographic knowledge. Some existing work develops this in practice, showing that there are inevitably continuities between the different personal and professional uses to which visual images and technologies may be put. For example, Okely has written anthropological text that uses autobiographical information as what she has called 'retrospective fieldwork'. This article, based on Okely's experiences of attending a boarding school, uses her memories and photographs from this period of her life (1996: 147-74). Likewise, Strecker and Jean Lydall's ethnographic film *Sweet Sorghum* (1995), about their daughter's childhood experiences of living with the Hamar people in Ethiopia while her parents were doing fieldwork, cut their own old 'home movie' footage with a more recently shot interview with their daughter. In such ways personal uses and experiences of visual technologies as well as actual images may later become part of a piece of professional work. Here a reflexive awareness of not only the visual dimensions of the culture being researched, but also of ethnographers' own cultural and individual understandings and uses of visual images and technologies, is important.

In my own fieldwork I have had to recognize that I have been just as much a consumer of photographic images and technologies as my informants (although maybe in different ways). Consumption and style have become the focus of multidisciplinary projects (e.g. Miller 1995; and preceding this Appadurai 1986), usually about the practices of 'other' people. Ethnographers' subjectivity and fieldwork styles may be theorized similarly: ethnographers are also consumers and apply certain practices of consumption to their visual technologies and images. Ethnographers' photography or video making may be related equally to their professional fieldwork narratives or personal biographies. Moreover, photography and photographs can represent an explicit meeting point (or continuity) between personal and professional identities; as material objects they pass through, and are invested with new meanings in, situations where individuals may wish to express different aspects of their identities. For example, when is a photograph of one's informants/friends kept in a 'research archive'? And when does it remain in one's personal collection? When I first returned from fieldwork in southern Spain in 1994 I had two sets of photographs: one of friends and one of 'research'. As time passed these photographs shifted between categories. They moved out of albums and eventually into a series of envelopes and folders. The personal/professional visual narratives into which I had initially divided them gradually became dissolved into other categories as I worked through the experience of fieldwork in an attempt to translate it into ethnographic knowledge. Thus my anthropological analysis began to appropriate my personal experience and possessions. Concurrently my informants and friends, both in 'the field' in Andalusia and 'at home' in the UK, appropriated my 'anthropological'

and personal photographs, incorporating them into, and making them meaningful in terms of, their own material and visual cultures as they included them in their own photograph albums.

Consuming technology and practising photography

Photographers and video makers, whether or not they are ethnographers, are individuals with their own intentions working in specific social and cultural contexts. In order to understand the practices of both ethnographers and informants as image-makers it is important to consider how relationships develop between individuals, visual technologies, practices and images, society and culture. Pierre Bourdieu (1990 [1965]) made an early attempt to theorize photographic practices and meanings to explain why individuals tend to perpetuate existing visual forms and styles in their visual work. Bourdieu proposed that while everything is potentially photographable, the photographic practice of individuals is governed by objective limitations. He argued that 'photography cannot be delivered over to the randomness of the individual imagination' but instead 'via the mediation of the *ethos*, the internalization of objective and common regularities, the group places this practice under its collective rule' (Bourdieu 1990 [1965]: 6). According to this interpretation, images produced by individual photographers and video makers would inevitably express the shared norms of that individual's society. Thus, Bourdieu argued 'that the most trivial photograph expresses, apart from the explicit intentions of the photographer, the system of schemes of perception, thought and appreciation common to a whole group' (1990: 6).

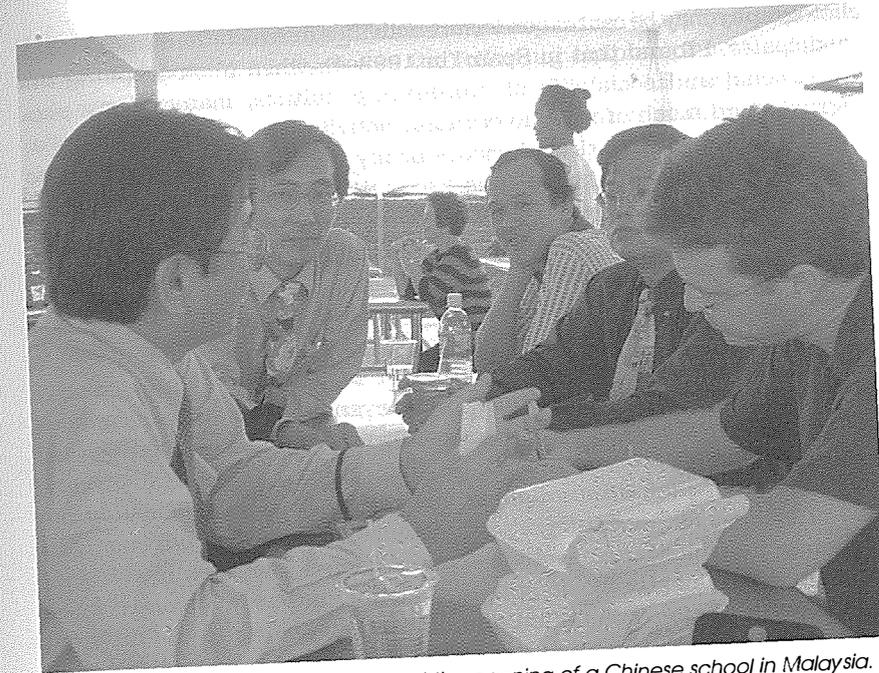
Individuals undoubtedly produce images that respond and refer to established conventions that have developed in and between existing 'visual cultures'. However, the implication of this is not necessarily that individual visual practices are dictated by an unconsciously held common set of beliefs. Bourdieu's explanation represents a problematic reduction of agency, subjectivity and individual creativity to external objective factors. It is difficult to reconcile with more convincing theories of agency and self-hood, such as Cohen's proposition that individuals are 'self-driven' (1992: 226) 'thinking selves' and the creators of culture (1994: 167), thus viewing 'society as composed of and by self-conscious individuals' (1994: 192). This focus on individual creativity has been brought to the forefront in some anthropological work. In particular, Rapport has argued in favour of a recognition of the individual 'as a seat of consciousness, as well-spring of creativity, as guarantor of meaning' as opposed to 'the *dissolved, decentered, deconstructed* individual actor and author as he or she appears in Durkheimian, Structuralist and Post-Structuralist schools of social science' (Rapport 1997: 7; original italics). This suggests that while it is likely that individuals will reference known

visual forms, styles, discourses and meanings through the content and form of their own visual images, this does not mean that they have simply internalized and are reproducing these formats. It is also probable that, as Evans and Hall have noted (1999: 3), their practices will intersect with camera and film manufacturing industries and developing and processing companies. Thus in creating images that reproduce or reference 'conventional' compositions and iconographies, individuals draw from personal and cultural resources of visual experience and knowledge. They thus creatively compose images that they intend to represent particular objects or meanings; moreover, they do so in particular social and material contexts. (In the following chapters I emphasize the importance of attending to the intentionality of ethnographic photographers and video makers as creative individuals.)

Images and image producers: breaking down the categories

Existing social scientific literature on photography tends to distinguish between family, snapshot, amateur and professional photographs. Similarly, distinctions are made between home movies and professional videos. For photographers themselves these categories and the distinctions between them can be important. To mistakenly put a photographer/amateur/snapshotter in the 'wrong' category can imply problematic assumptions about his or her knowledge of both photographic technique and his or her subject matter. For instance, in Spain bullfight *aficionados* associate different types of bullfight photography with particular gendered identities and corresponding understandings of the bullfight (see Pink 1997a). Work on photography in North American and European cultures implies that similar categories of image and image producers often appear to be assumed by both informants and researchers, and are not usually questioned (e.g. Bourdieu 1990; Chalfen 1987; Pink 1997a; Slater 1995). However (these, like all categories, are in fact culturally constructed, and individually understood and experienced). Individual photographers, video makers or visual images may not fit neatly into just one of the identities that is implied by the distinction between categories such as domestic, amateur, professional (or ethnographic) images and producers. No photographic or video image need have one single identity and, as I have noted above, no images are, for example, essentially 'ethnographic' but are given ethnographic meanings in relation to the discourses that people use to define them.

The categorization of different types of photography and photographer also raises issues concerning professional identity for ethnographers who use still photography or video. For example, if categories of 'domestic', 'tourist', 'documentary' or 'ethnographic' are used to define a fieldwork photograph, each implies different types of knowledge and intentionality for the photographer. Some criticisms of the value of ethnographers'



John Postill (for right) doing fieldwork at the opening of a Chinese school in Malaysia.
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Figure 1.3

In 2003–4, when, with our son, I accompanied John Postill during his fieldwork in Malaysia, my photographs of them taken at events that John was attending as part of his fieldwork (recorded on my family photography CD) had personal meanings as memories of our stay in Malaysia (where I was not doing research myself), and as such of a similar status to vacation photography. For me the memories associated with this photograph are to do with the taste of the meals in the containers in the foreground and of exploring with our son. For John (filed in his digital research archive) these same images were evocative of fieldwork experiences and knowledge.

photography have suggested that it is 'unlikely to be professional', 'mere vacation photography', 'unsuitable for exhibition' or 'less relevant as representation' than images produced by professional, commissioned photographers (all comments social scientists have voiced). These opinions assume there is an essential difference between professional ethnographic and personal leisure photographs or video. However, during ethnographic fieldwork the distinction between leisure and work is frequently ambiguous, for both ethnographers (especially anthropologists, for whom it raises the question of whether one is ever 'off duty') and 'informants' who may find it difficult to regard some 'research' activities as 'work'. Often an ethnographer's research is structured by other people's leisure time (among other things). Correspondingly, a proportion of 'ethnographic'

photography may be centred on leisure activities in which the ethnographer participates. I found that in Spain (in 1992–4), when photographing the professional and social life of bullfighting culture, many of my photographs and much of my photographic activity was structured simultaneously by my own work and leisure or my informants' leisure (see also Chapter 5). Thus the photographs I took at birthday parties, bullfights and official receptions were simultaneously ethnographic, anthropological, family and leisure photographs. While fixed categories imply that if an ethnographer's photography or video is classified as 'tourist' or 'leisure' images, then they are not 'ethnographic', my experiences indicate that a fieldwork photograph or video need never be fixed in any single category and that it would be mistaken to distinguish categorically between leisure and professional images and situate ethnographers' images accordingly. Ethnographers' own photographs are often worked into a range of different personal and professional narratives and subject positions (of ethnographers and their informants). They do not belong in any one fixed category and may be incorporated differently as the same individuals re-negotiate their gendered identities in different situations (see Chapter 2).

Fieldwork photographs often simultaneously belong to the different but connected material cultures of visual anthropology or sociology and of the culture being 'studied' (see Chapter 5). This may raise certain issues. For instance, what happens when ethnographers start to produce the very material culture they are studying; what impact do ethnographers have when they participate in and contribute to the visual discourses they are analysing; and what are the effects of informants' appropriations of ethnographers' images. I explore some of these scenarios in the following chapters.

A note on terminology

In the first edition of this book I referred to the people who take part in our research as 'informants'. This has been the standard term used by anthropologists for many years, but as Amit has pointed out it is nevertheless one that a good number of anthropologists do not feel comfortable with. She suggests that because of the intimacy and familiarity of the relationships that develop between anthropologists and the people whose lives their research becomes based on as the result of long-term fieldwork there exists 'the discomfiture that many anthropologists have with using terms such as informant, respondent or research subject as textual references for people they have known as friends, neighbours, advisers, etc' (2000: 3). The same can also apply to the collaborative work ethnographers develop in shorter-term projects. The relationships we develop with the people we work with to produce ethnographic knowledge do not involve our extraction of information from them, but the

co-production of knowledge. This relationship is inevitably unequal, even if as in the examples I discuss in the following chapters the 'informants' also stand to gain something from it. In this sense changing the terminology does not necessarily represent any qualitative shift in the potentially exploitative nature of the relationship (cf. Amit 2000: 3). Nevertheless other terms have, across different disciplines, become popular recently. Two that seem particularly appropriate are those of 'research participant' and 'interlocutor'. The former is usefully open in that it can refer to any number of different forms of participating in ethnography. The latter, because it implies that the person is in dialogue or conversation with the ethnographer, stresses the intersubjectivity of the encounter. However the most likely scenario of any ethnographic research is that the ethnographer will interact with different 'informants' in ways that might represent any one of these potential relationships. For example, some people might behave as respondents, others will enter into extended dialogues with the ethnographer and others might participate by actively shaping the form the research takes. In this book I do not make a commitment to any one term, but use that which appears most appropriate for the situation discussed.

Summary

Ethnographers themselves are members of societies in which photography and video are already practised and understood in particular ways. The ways in which individual ethnographers approach the visual in their research and representation are inevitably influenced by a range of factors, including theoretical beliefs, disciplinary agendas, personal experience, gendered identities and different visual cultures. Fundamental to understanding the significance of the visual in ethnographic work is a reflexive appreciation of how such elements combine to produce visual meanings and ethnographic knowledge.

FURTHER READING

- Amit, V. (2000) *Constructing the Field*. London: Routledge. (An edited volume of case studies that discuss the contemporary fieldwork context)
- Bell, D., Caplan, P. and Jahan Karim, W. (1993) *Gendered Fields*. London: Routledge. (An edited volume that offers a very useful series of case studies of the gendered nature and relationships of fieldwork)
- Edgar, I. (2004) *Guide to Imagework: Imagination-Based Research Methods*. London: Routledge. (An introduction to Edgar's imagework methodology, which could be used as a complementary method to the visual ethnographic methods described in this volume)
- Howes, D. (2005) *Empire of the Senses: The Sensory Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg. (A volume of key readings about sensory aspects of culture, which usefully contextualizes the place of vision)