

DOING

Visual Ethnography

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CHAPTER 1

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

Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations (see Pink 1997a: 3) and dreams (see Edgar 1997). 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, words or any other aspect of culture and society. Nevertheless, ethnographers should not be obliged to make the visual *central* to their work (see Morphy and Banks 1997: 14), but to explore its relation to other senses and discourses.

The visual has recently received much critical attention from scholars of the social 'sciences' and humanities. It is now commonly recognized that it is time to, as Crawford (1992: 66) recommended, depart from notions of 'pure image' and 'pure word' and instead to emphasize 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 is it that 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, Hammersley and Atkinson define 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 representations 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 being 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 Okely 1996; Okely and Callaway 1992) 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 have 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.

Postmodern thinkers have 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, like Walsh, proposed that such approaches take reflexivity too far. Walsh argues that the 'social and cultural world must be the ground and reference for ethnographic writing, and reflexive ethnography should involve a keen awareness of the interpenetration of reality and representation'. He insists that researchers should not 'abandon all forms of realism as the basis for doing ethnography' (Walsh 1998: 220).

Walsh's argument presents a tempting and balanced way of thinking about the experienced reality in which people live 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. Cohen and 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 in the way 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. For example, as I found during my research in Guinea Bissau, there were at the time many 'rich white development workers' in the area where I worked and I was classified as part of this group by many Guinea Bissauans (see Pink 1998a). Clearly their understandings of my identity and status had implications for the way I was able to interact with local people and the specific knowledge that our interactions produced. In this particular research context economic inequalities unavoidably formed a back-drop to my relationships with Guinea Bissauans (see, for example, Pink 1999b). My use of photography and video (technologies that are prohibitively costly for most Guinea Bissauans) therefore had to be situated in terms of the wider economic context as well as my own identity as a researcher. 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 1998b, 1999c). 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.

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.

Recent developments in gender theory 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 in to 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. 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. Kulick has likened the traditional narrative structure of ethnography as 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 Mulvey (1989) in film studies, and of the 'archive' developed by 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 Foucault, these ideas have been re-appropriated to discuss visual representations in other cultures (e.g. Pinney 1992a) 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). These collaborative approaches that confront and attempt to resolve the gendered power relations of technology and representation are discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

Unobservable ethnography and visual culture

In the Introduction I have described the realist view of visual technologies as tools for creating visual records. This view persists in some social science research methods text books. For example, Flick refers 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 Fabian (1983) have 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. Second, 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 a recent theme in cultural studies as well as anthropology. As Jenks has 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. As Strecker emphasizes, 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. Moreover, these visible elements of experience will be given different meanings as different people use their own subjective knowledge to interpret them.

Strecker criticizes existing treatments of images in ethnography, pointing out that ethnographers have tended to 'stand between' their informants and audiences/readers by translating images into words. In doing so ethnographers impose one (their own) interpretation on the images, thus dismissing the possibility that the images may have more than one potential meaning. Instead, Strecker proposes 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 (especially Chapter 5) 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.

Photography and video do nevertheless bear some relationship to 'reality'. However the connection between visual images and experienced reality is constructed through individual subjectivity and interpretation of images. As Wright points 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. Recent work in anthropology (e.g. Kulick and Willson 1995; Okely 1996; Okely and Callaway 1992) has 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 Lydall's ethnographic film *Sweet Sorghum*, about their daughter's childhood experiences of living with the Hamar people in Ethiopia while her parents were doing fieldwork, cuts their own old 'home movie' footage with a 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 recently become the focus of multidisciplinary projects (e.g. Miller

1995; and preceding this Appadurai 1986), usually about the practices of 'other' people. However, 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. Bourdieu (1990) 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 argues 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: 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 argues '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 recent and 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 (as opposed to Giddens's notion of the individual as the product of structure) has recently 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 1997a: 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 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 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' 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 I have heard social scientists voice). 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 is one 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, 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.

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 is 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.

CHAPTER 2

Planning and Practising Visual Methods: Appropriate Uses and Ethical Issues

Why use 'visual methods'?

It is impossible to predict, and mistaken to prescribe, precise methods for ethnographic research. Similarly, it would be unreasonable to 'require that visual methods be used in all contexts'. Rather, as Morphy and Banks suggest, 'they should be used where appropriate, with the rider that appropriateness will not always be obvious in advance' (1997: 14). In practice, decisions are best made once researchers are in a position to assess which specific visual methods will be appropriate or ethical in a particular research context, therefore allowing researchers to account for their relationships with informants and their experience and knowledge of local visual cultures. Nevertheless, certain decisions and indicators about the use of visual images and technologies in research usually need to be made before commencing fieldwork. Often research proposals, preparations and plans must be produced before fieldwork begins; the fieldwork may be in an area where technologies are difficult to purchase or hire; if the project is to be funded and equipment purchased from a research grant, technological needs must be anticipated and budgeted for.

The appropriateness of 'visual methods'

Banks divides visual research methods into three broad activities: 'making visual representations (studying society by producing images)'; 'examining pre-existing visual representations' (studying images for information about society); 'collaborating with social actors in the production of visual representations' (Banks n.d.). These can generally be planned and developed before fieldwork. However, more specific uses of visual images and technologies tend to develop as part of the social relationships and activities in which ethnographers engage during fieldwork. Some of these will be purposefully thought out and strategically applied. In Chapters 3 and 4 the specific applications of general models

of visual research methods are discussed in detail. In other cases unanticipated uses of the visual may be discovered by accident and retrospectively defined as 'visual methods'. Ethnographers might repeat such activities (sometimes in collaboration with informants), thus developing and refining the method throughout the research. However, methods developed within one research context may not be transferable to, or appropriate in, others. For example, when I started to research Spanish bullfighting culture I began photographing people at the many public receptions held to present trophies, exhibitions and book launches. After my first reception I showed my photographs to the organizers and participants and they asked me for copies of certain photos, some of which they gave to their colleagues. By keeping note of their requests and asking questions about the images I gained a sense of how individuals situated themselves in relation to other individuals in 'bullfighting culture'. As I attended more receptions I consciously repeated this 'method' and developed my use of the camera and the photographs in response to the relationship that developed between my informants, the technology, the images and myself as photographer (see Chapter 3; Pink 1998b, 1999c).

This method of researching with images was appropriate in bullfighting culture partly because it imitated and was incorporated into my informants' existing cultural and individual uses of photography. When I began to photograph during my next fieldwork in West Africa, I considered using a similar method. However I quickly realized that in Guinea Bissau I was working in an economic system where photographs were costly prestige items. For instance, commercially, a studio photograph would cost the price of ten loaves of bread – a large dent in most local people's budgets. Here I could not participate in local people's photographic culture in the same way, as any use of photographic equipment and images implied economic inequalities. In this context, other new methods had to be developed (see Chapter 3; Pink 1998d, 1999b).

Before attempting visual research it is useful to read up on visual methods used by other ethnographers. However, it is also crucial to evaluate their appropriateness for a new project. This includes considering how visual methods, images and technologies will be interpreted by individuals in the cultures where research will be done, in addition to assessing how well visual methods suit the aims of specific projects. In some situations visual methods appear inappropriate. For example, in Guinea Bissau I undertook a research project to assess people's willingness and ability to pay for health services and medicines in the region in which I was living. This included a series of focus group discussions in rural areas and a European colleague suggested I video record the discussions and interviews. I recalled a case study in which Freudenthal (1992) describes how he used video recordings of group discussions with rural villagers in a development research project in



Figure 2.1 When I first asked these Guinea Bissauan bread sellers if I could photograph them, they said 'no', thinking that I was a commercial photographer who would charge them for the images. When I explained that I was not and that I wanted the photographs for my work they were happy to pose. In Guinea Bissau one studio or location photograph taken by a local commercial photographer costs several times the price of one locally baked fresh loaf of bread.

Tanzania. His method succeeded in creating a participatory approach to the production of knowledge about the evaluation of a small local forestry project. However, basing my opinion on my prior knowledge of the culture I was working with and the limited time that I would spend in each village (approximately two days) I felt using video would be inappropriate. I discussed the methods with a local health director who agreed that the time and resources available to the project were insufficient to allow us to develop an appropriate context of trust and collaboration for the use of video.

Researchers should not have fixed, preconceived expectations of what it will be possible to achieve by using visual research methods in a given situation. Sometimes visual methods will not support the researcher's aims. Hastrup's (1992) description of her attempt as a woman anthropologist to photograph an exclusively male Icelandic sheep market demonstrates this well. She describes the difficulty and discomfort she experienced while photographing this event but notes that having accomplished the task she felt a sense of satisfaction 'to have been there and to have been able to document this remarkable event' (1992: 9). She had left with the sensation that she 'even had photos from the sacred grove of a male secret society' (1992: 9). However her photographic

method was not appropriate for recording the type of information she had anticipated and she writes of the disappointment she experienced on later seeing the printed photographs: 'they were hopeless. Ill-focused, badly lit, lopsided and showing nothing but the completely uninteresting backs of men and rams' (1992: 9). She emphasizes the difference between her experience of photographing and the end results. While I was taking them I had the impression that I was making an almost pornographic record of a secret ritual. They showed me nothing of the sort but bore the marks of my own inhibition, resulting from my transgression of the boundary between gender categories' (1992: 9). Hastrup's expectations of what she may obtain by using this visual research method were not met. She anticipated that her photographs would represent ethnographic 'evidence' of her experience of the event: 'a record of a secret ritual'. To assess why this was not achieved she generalizes that 'pictures have a limited value as ethnographic "evidence"', and the 'secret' of informants' experiences can only be told in words (1992: 9). While I would agree that as ethnographic 'evidence' photographs indeed have limited value (see Chapter 1), this does not necessarily indicate that one may only represent ethnographic knowledge with words (see especially Chapters 6–8). The potential of photography or video as a realist recording device or a way of exploring individual subjectivities and creative collaboration will be realized differently in every application.

Sometimes using cameras and making images of informants is inappropriate for ethical reasons (see below). In some situations photographs or videos of informants may put them in political danger, or subject them to moral criticism. The appropriateness of visual methods should not simply be judged on questions of whether the methods suit the objectives of the research question and if they fit well with the local culture in which one is working. Rather, such evaluations should be informed by an ethnographic appreciation of how visual knowledge is interpreted in a cross-cultural context. Therefore decisions about the particular methodologies and modes of representation to be used should pay attention to intersections between local visual cultures, the ways in which the visual is treated by wider users or audiences of the research and ethnographers' own knowledge, experience and sensitivity. By thinking through the implications of image production and visual representation in this way ethnographers should be able to evaluate how their 'ethnographic' images would be invested with different meanings by different political, local and academic discourses.

Planning visual research

Without good knowledge of the context in which one is planning to do ethnographic research it is very difficult to predict how and to what extent visual images and technologies may be used. Similarly, the basis upon

which one may judge if visual methods will be ethical, appropriate, or a useful way to participate or collaborate with the people with whom one is working, will be contingent on the particular research context. Plans to use visual methods made before commencing the research may appear unnecessary or out of place once the research has begun. For example, my original proposal to do research about women and bullfighting in Southern Spain anticipated the extensive use of video. However, once in the field I found my informants only occasionally used video cameras. I was working in a culture where photography was a dominant source of knowledge and representation about bullfighting. In this situation it was usually more appropriate to participate in local events as a 'photographer' than as a 'video maker'. Since some of my informants also participated in their 'bullfighting culture' as amateur photographers, I was able to 'share' an activity with them as well as producing images which interested them. At the time photography fitted the demands of the project. However, retrospectively, I was able to identify ways in which video could have supported the research, fitted into the local bullfighting culture and also served my informants' interests. Such insights could be used as the basis of future research plans.

Usually ethnographers with some experience of working in a particular culture and society already have a sense of the visual and technological cultures of the people with whom they plan to work. Ethnographers should have an idea of how their photographic/video research practices will develop in relation to local practices, and a sense of how they may learn through the interface between their own and local visual practices. Such background knowledge makes it easier to present a research proposal that defines quite specifically how and to what ends visual technologies and images are to be employed. This may entail developing insights from prior research in the same culture, doing a short 'pilot study', or researching aspects of visual cultures from library and museum sources, ethnographic film and the internet. This need not be solely a 'traditional' literature review about visual culture. The first stage of the research process may be an interactive exploration of websites and e-mail contacts where elements of the visual culture of a research area are represented. For instance, if I was to begin research into the visual representations of bullfighting culture now, at the beginning of 2000 rather than the early 1990s, an ideal starting point from my base in the United Kingdom would be an exploration of the now numerous bullfighting websites and on-line magazines. Similarly, before beginning fieldwork in Guinea Bissau, few internet resources were available. However in summer 1998, one year after my return, a website with photographic images and text had been built. E-mail communications and electronic exchanges of digital images are also options for researchers working with informants who are technology users themselves. The internet should not be ignored as an aspect of some contemporary ethnographic fields (see Pink 1999a).

Pre-fieldwork surveys of literature, electronic and other visual texts and examples of how other ethnographers have successfully worked with visual images and technologies in specific cultures can indicate the potential for using visual methods in particular fieldwork contexts. Combined with some considered guesswork about people's visual practices and discourses, this can form a basis from which to develop a research proposal. However, neither a researcher's own preparation, nor other ethnographers' accounts can predict how a 'visual method' will develop in a new project. Just as ethnography can only really be learnt in practice, ethnographic uses of visual images and technologies develop from practice-based knowledge. Moreover, as projects evolve novel uses of photography or video may develop to explore and represent unexpected issues. Chapters 3 and 4 are intended to represent sources of examples, ideas and inspirations through which ethnographers may develop their own styles.

Choosing the technology for the project

Like images, and any material object, technologies are also interpreted differently by individuals in different cultures. If possible, ethnographers should explore the meanings informants give to different visual technologies before purchasing equipment.

The selection of a digital or 'traditional' camera, a semi-professional video camera or the cheapest hand-held VHS model may be related to economic factors, but should also account for how the equipment one uses will become part of one's identity both during fieldwork and in academic circles. Individuals constantly re-situate themselves and construct their self-identities in relation to not only other individuals but also to material objects and cultural discourses. The visual technologies that ethnographers use, like the images they produce and view, will be invested with meanings, inspire responses and are likely to become a topic of conversation. Some informants may have a 'shared' interest in photography or video (in some cases they will have better cameras and skills than the researcher). For example, in Spain my amateur interest in bullfight photography was shared with several local people. This led us to discuss technical as well as aesthetic aspects of bullfighting photography, such as the best film speeds, zoom lenses and seating in the arena. In a recent video interviewing project in the United Kingdom and Spain, interviewees appeared relaxed with my domestic digital video camera simply seeing it as one of the latest pieces of new video technology. In comparison to solitary field diary writing, photography and video making can appear more 'visible', comprehensible activities to informants, and may link more closely with their own experience. Photographs and video-tapes themselves become commodities for exchange and the sites of negotiation, for example, among

informants, between researchers and informants, between researchers and their families and friends 'at home' and among researchers. In short, the visual technologies and images associated with ethnographers will also be implicated in the way other people construct their identities and thus impact on their social relationships and experiences.

Therefore, when selecting and applying for funding for technology it is important to remember that a camera will be part of the research context and an element of the ethnographer's identity. It will impinge on the social relationships in which he or she becomes involved and on how informants represent themselves. Different technologies impact on these relationships and identities in different ways. In some cases image quality may have to be forsaken to produce images that represent the type of ethnographic knowledge sought. For example, the relationship between ethnographer and subjects that can develop in a photographic or filmic situation created by the use of professional lighting and sound equipment will differ from when the ethnographer is working alone with just a small hand-held camcorder or stills camera. The images may be darker and grainier, the sound less sharp, but the ethnographic knowledge they invoke may be more useful to the project.

In tandem with the social and cultural implications of the use of visual technologies, practical and technical issues also arise. How will a camera and other equipment be powered and transported? (Will there even be electricity?) What post-production resources will be available? Finally, what resources will be available for showing the images to informants? In some locations cameras can be connected to TV monitors and video recorders. In others, a solar-powered lap-top computer might be used to screen digital still and video images. When purchasing equipment it is important to keep track of technological developments and also of post-fieldwork equipment requirements. Will it be necessary to have the technology to transfer digital images on to a computer for analysis, or on to another tape format for editing? As Ratcliffe (n.d.) points out, most up-to-date information on video and photographic technology can be found in specialist consumer report magazines. These can be purchased in most high-street newsagents. Both equipment and production can be costly and it is important to budget realistically for the cost of tape transfer using editing facilities, printing and computing equipment.

Ethics and ethnographic research

A consideration of the ethical implications of ethnographic research and representation should underpin any research project. Most guides and courses on research methods dedicate a section to ethics. Such texts usually cover a standard set of issues such as informed consent, covert research, confidentiality, harm to informants, exploitation and 'giving something back', ownership of 'data', and protection of informants.

These indisputably relevant issues are critically reviewed later in this chapter. However, the issue of ethics in ethnographic work refers to more than simply the ethical conduct of the researcher. Rather, it demands that ethnographers develop an understanding of the ethical context(s) in which they work, a reflexive approach to their own ethical beliefs, and a critical approach to the idea that *one* ethical code of conduct could be hierarchically superior to all others. Because ethics are so embedded in the specific research contexts in which ethnographers work, like decisions about which visual research methods to employ in a project, ethical decisions cannot be concluded until the researcher is actually in the field.

In practice, ethics are bound up with power relations between ethnographers, informants, professionals, sponsors, gatekeepers, governments, the media and other institutions (see Ellen 1984: 134). Ethical decisions are ultimately made by individual ethnographers, usually with reference to personal and professional codes (often laid out by professional organizations) of ethical conduct and the intentionalities of other parties. The personal dimension of ethnographic research, the moral and philosophical beliefs of the researcher and his or her view of reality impinges greatly on the ethical practices that he or she applies in research and representation.

Ethics are also bound up with the epistemological concerns of academic disciplines – they both inform and are informed by theory and methodology. For instance, a research methodology that is informed by a relativist approach requires that ethics becomes not simply a matter of ensuring that research is done in an ethical way (i.e. conforms to a fixed ethical code or set of rules), but that ethics becomes an area of philosophical debate in itself. If difference denotes plurality and equality rather than hierarchy, then it would seem unreasonable to argue that one ethical code would be superior to another. This problematizes the idea that there is one set of rules that defines *the* ethical way to undertake ethnographic research and challenges the assumption that ethnographic research may be guided by one code of ethical conduct rather than by another. However, such a relativist approach to ethics raises difficult questions. For instance, how relativist can ethnographic research and representation afford to be in relation to ethics while remaining an 'ethical' activity? Should ethnographers accept all ethical codes as being equally permissible? Clearly there are some activities that ethnographers would wish to render 'unethical'.

Rapport has suggested that the inadequacy of a relativist approach for dealing with ethics may be resolved by a focus on the individual. He argues that '[i]nstead of relativistic making of allowances for different cultures maintaining different traditions – whatever the consequences to their individual members – I want to outline a liberal basis for social science which recognises individuals as universal human agents above whom there is no greater good, without whom there is no cultural

tradition' (Rapport 1997a: 181). For Rapport the ethical approach of social science should be one that responds against 'the violation of individual integrity, the threat to the individual's conscious potential, the ideological prioritising of community above and beyond the individuals who at any one moment constitute it' (1997a: 181). Therefore he is able to argue that social scientists should be able to see a number of practices (such as 'Naziism, religious fundamentalism, female circumcision, infanticide and *suttee*') as unethical 'because of the hurt they cause to individuals, because of the harm which accrues in those social milieux where an ethic of interpersonal tolerance is not managed' (1997a: 181).

Rapport's principle offers a basis upon which ethnographers may evaluate the ethical practices of themselves as researchers, their informants and other individuals, agencies and institutions with whom they come into contact during research. Ultimately, the decision will be a personal one for each ethnographer has to decide whether his or her research practices and representations are ethical before these are held up to the scrutiny of others who will then interpret this question for themselves. Similarly, the question of the ethics of those whom we study, and the ethics of studying and/or making moral judgements about them, is one that individual ethnographers must address for themselves at some stage in their research. It will also be addressed by those who read or view their representations at another stage. During my research about bullfighting I was often confronted with the question 'was bullfighting morally right or wrong?' While carrying out this research I felt morally able to 'stand on the fence'. I did not commit myself to a moral judgement either way, and still maintain that I don't. However, I was aware that some of my Spanish informants and some acquaintances in the United Kingdom felt that not only bullfighting, but also my research and my participation in bullfighting culture by attending (and sometimes enjoying) bullfights was unethical. They felt that by researching and writing on the subject I was effectively condoning what they regarded an unethical practice. On occasion I could empathize with their subject position, but I felt I was doing nothing more than shifting subject positions; I was never making a personal commitment to either standpoint. Aware that some people, especially animal rights activists, would judge my informants' practices as unethical, and having heard their views that bullfighting fans were 'blood thirsty', 'violent' and 'barbaric', I felt obliged to 'protect' my informants by attempting to represent them as sensitive and moral human beings and to describe their understanding of bullfighting in a way that indicated they did not fit the unethical profile others had associated with them. The ethics that guide ethnographers may be a critical discourse on the ethics of the people they study, or of an individual or institution who has power over them. Rapport admits that his perspective on ethics (see above) is personal. Similarly, my own approach to the ethics of bullfighting was based on a personal conviction. Another ethnographer might argue that any activity

that causes harm or hurt to animals is unethical, thus taking a different approach to the representation of ethnographic work on bullfighting.

As Pels has pointed out for anthropology, in the contemporary world:

Globalising movements have resulted in a situation in which the ethics of anthropology can no longer be thought of simply in term of the dyad between researcher and researched: anthropology is placed squarely within a more complex field of governmentality, cross-cultural conflict and global mobility. Some of these developments seem threatening to anthropology, others seem to provide new opportunities, and all raise novel questions about the ethics of anthropological research. (Pels 1996: 18)

It is not solely ethnographers and informants who are implicated in the ethical issues researchers confront during fieldwork. Indeed, there may be a whole range of other interested parties and agendas that shape the ethical conduct of ethnographers and their informants either by enforcing their own guidelines, or by posing a threat to the safety of those represented in ethnographic work. Ethnographers therefore need to understand how plural moralities are at play in any ethnographic situation, and the extent to which these different ethical codes are constructed and interpreted in relation to one another. Ethnographers should seek to identify where the ethics of the research fit in with these other ethical codes with which it intersects. Ultimately, ethics in ethnography is concerned with making decisions based on interpretations of the moralities and intentionalities of other people and the institutions they may represent.

Visual research methods and ethical ethnography

The theoretical underpinning of my approach to ethics and visual research methods is based on the relationship between vision and reality discussed in Chapter 1. This emphasizes the specificity of the visual meanings that operate in the different cultures and societies in which ethnographers work and in the different ways ethnographers' images can be interpreted by other bodies such as academics, informants, professionals, sponsors, gatekeepers, governments, the media and other institutions. However conscious ethnographers are of the arbitrary nature of photographic meanings, ethnographic images are still likely to be treated as 'truthful recordings' or 'evidence' by non-academic viewers. Ethnographers should pay particular attention to how different approaches to the visual and different meanings given to the same images may coincide or collide in the domains in which we research and represent our work.

Below I critically review existing approaches to ethics in ethnographic research methodology, to consider their implications for the use of visual images.

Covert research and the question of informed consent

As a scientific-realist strategy, covert research was assumed to enable ethnographers to better observe an 'objective truth'. In the case of the covert use of video recording and photography the same principle was applied: the use of a hidden camera was thought to allow researchers to produce images of an objective reality, less 'distorted' by their own subjectivity (see Chapter 1). In Chapter 1 I have noted that such objectivity can never actually be achieved. Moreover, in my opinion, any type of covert research requires a careful consideration of ethics. This does not mean all covert research is necessarily unethical (see, for example, Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 263–8), but that ethical decisions should be made according to the specific research context.

The approach to photography and video in ethnographic research I propose in Chapters 3 and 4 emphasizes the idea of collaboration between researcher and informant. Covert research implies the researcher videoing and photographing the behaviour of informants in a secretive rather than collaborative way, for example, using a hidden camera or using the camera under the guise of a role other than that of researcher. A collaborative method, in contrast, assumes that researcher and informant are consciously working together to produce visual images and specific types of knowledge through technological procedures and discussions. However, there may be occasions where covert image-making becomes part of a collaboration, for example, if an ethnographer collaborates with informants to photograph others who are not aware they are being photographed. The ethical implications of such work need to be reviewed for each project and on the terms of each individual researcher. If a researcher considers the very act of recording covertly a violation of the integrity of their informants, and thus unethical, then covert work will be ruled out. In other situations an ethnographer may feel that to record or photograph an activity secretly is ethical because he or she will be able to take personal responsibility for the images and not to violate the integrity of those covertly recorded.

The distinction between overt and covert research is, however, further complicated by challenging the notion of 'informed consent'. First, because cross-culturally consent may take different forms, involve different individuals and relationships and have different meanings. Secondly, informants may be keen to collaborate without actually engaging fully with *why* a researcher would want to video record certain activities. Even if informants collaborate or participate in the production of ethnographic video and photography, it is unlikely that their understanding or intentions *vis-à-vis* the project will coincide exactly with the ethnographer's. In such cases it could be argued that even if consent is given, it is not *informed* consent, and the researcher is (even if unintentionally) keeping his or her real agenda hidden from the informants.

The ethical implications of covertly shot video or photography vary at different stages of the project at which the images may become accessible to different parties. If the ethnographer is to publish covertly produced images, this raises a range of new issues (see below).

Permission and the 'right' to photograph/video at public events

It is good practice to ask permission to photograph in any public context or event, as well as seeking the consent of the individuals photographed, and in some situations official permission is required. Permission to photograph and video at public events may be granted in a variety of ways. During my fieldwork in Spain, like many of my informants, I often photographed the bullfight. While it was not allowed to video record a bullfight without formal permission, photography was usually freely permitted. Much of this involves photographing individual performers, however their permission is rarely asked and their fans tend to assume their right to photograph a public figure. Bullfighters are frequently photographed before and after as well as during their performances. Fans queue up at their hotels, hoping for a chance to pose with the performer, while the arena is packed with many aspiring bullfight photographers with a range of different types of camera and skills. In this research context public photography was freely permitted and acceptable. In other field contexts formal permission is needed before photographing in any public place or event. During my first weeks of fieldwork in Guinea Bissau I began to research the forthcoming carnival. With the idea of eventually photographing aspects of carnival, I started researching local people's photographs of previous carnivals and seeking out public photographic records or exhibitions. I later photographed some of my neighbours preparing their hair for carnival and the carnival masks that had won previous competitions. My informants told me that to photograph or video carnival in the capital city, Bissau, a photography or video permit must be purchased. Knowing this, I approached the regional office of the Ministry of Culture in Canchungo, the town I was living in; it seemed polite to ask the head of the local office for permission to photograph in the town. He told me that as far as he was concerned I was allowed to photograph during carnival and instructed me that if anyone challenged me I should tell them he had given me permission. This raised several issues for me, since it seemed that I had been given permission to photograph carnival participants without their consent. In practice, I photographed only those individuals who agreed to be photographed (usually people I already knew), or those participating in activities that they knew were likely to be photographed.

The question of whether an ethnographer has permission to photograph or video differs from situation to situation and according to whom we listen. Often it seems obligatory initially to negotiate official permission to video or photograph with institutional gatekeepers. However,

permission to video or photograph individuals in their capacity as participants in events is usually best negotiated with each individual or group. The ethics of obtaining permissions vary in different research contexts, according to project aims and the agendas of researchers, informants and other interested parties.

Harm to informants

While ethnographic research is unlikely to cause harm as, for example, drugs trials may, it can lead to emotional distress or anxiety (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 268). Sensitivity to how individuals in different cultures may experience anxiety or stress through their involvement in research is important in any ethnographic project. However, rather than prescribing actual methods of preventing harm to informants in visual research, my intention is to suggest a way of thinking about how research, anxiety and harm are understood and experienced in different ethnographic contexts. General methods of preventing harm to informants may not be locally applicable. First, there are culturally different ways of understanding harm and of causing it with images. Therefore, in order to prevent harm being caused, a researcher needs a good understanding of local notions of harm and anxiety, how these may be experienced and how they relate to images. Secondly, the idea that informants may find the research process distressing is usually based on the assumption that the informants are having the research *done to them*. In this scenario the researcher is supposed to be in control of the research situation and therefore also assumes responsibility for the potential harm that may be done to the informants. This approach requires that in taking responsibility to protect their informants, researchers should be sensitive to the visual culture and experience of the individuals with whom they are working. For instance, ethnographers need to judge, or ask (if appropriate), if there are personal or cultural reasons why some people may find particular photographs shown to them in interviews or discussions offensive, disturbing or distressing, or if being photographed or videoed themselves would be stressful.

Anxiety and harm to informants can often be avoided through a collaborative approach to visual research and joint ownership of visual materials. Here researchers and informants should maintain some degree of control over the content of the materials and their subsequent uses.

Harm, representation and permission to publish

Above I have discussed the issue of permission to video or photograph during ethnographic research. The publication of the research raises new issues. Sometimes this is already a concern when the images are shot, especially if the ethnographer's project is to produce a documentary or

photographic exhibition. These intentions should be made clear to the subjects of the images. Some ethnographic filmmakers ask the subjects of their films to sign consent forms (see Barbash and Taylor 1997). However, if this is not done, moral and legal issues of ownership of the images and of consent may arise. If the images were produced covertly, without the permission of their subjects, the moral right of the video maker or photographer to publish them could be questioned. Moreover, it cannot be assumed that people have consented to being in a publicly screened video or to have large images of themselves exhibited in a gallery simply because they have allowed the images to be taken or have responded to the camera. This raises questions such as should the subjects of photographs and video be allowed to see printed or edited copies before they consent to their images entering a public domain? Different filmmakers, photographers and ethnographers have their own opinions and practices regarding this. Much of ethnography is about making private aspects of people's lives public. Therefore, who should be responsible for deciding the content of the visual representation of other people's lives?

Questions of harm to individuals, or institutions become pressing when it comes to publication. For photography and video this is particularly important since it is usually impossible to preserve anonymity of people and places. Ethnographers have to make choices regarding if and how video footage will be incorporated into the final publication of the research. This requires a serious consideration of ethical issues and possibly the participation of the informants or the subjects of the images. The publication of certain photographic and video images may damage individuals' reputations; they may not want certain aspects of their identities revealed or their personal opinions to be made public. People express certain things in one context that they would not say in another, and in the apparent intimacy of a video interview an informant may make comments that he or she would not make elsewhere. Institutions may also be damaged by irresponsible publication of images. The public front of any institution is often a veneer that holds fast the conflicts and organizational problems that are part of its everyday order.

Finally, once visual and other representations of ethnographic work have been produced and disseminated publicly neither author nor subjects of the work can control the ways in which these representations are interpreted and given meanings by their readers, viewers or audiences. In Chapters 6, 7 and 8 these issues are raised in a discussion of the visual representation of ethnographic work.

Exploitation and 'giving something back'

Usually ethnographers stand to gain personally from their interactions with informants, through an undergraduate or masters degree project, PhD thesis, consultancy project or other publication that will enhance

their career. In contrast, informants may not accrue similar benefits from their participation in research projects. Conventional responses to this ethical problem focus on how ethnographers may 'give something back'; how the participants in the research may be empowered through their involvement in the project, or that research should be directed at the powerful rather than the weak (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 274–5). None of these responses, however, provide satisfactory solutions to the exploitative nature of research (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1995).

The idea of 'giving something back' implies that the ethnographer extracts something (usually the data) and then makes a gift of something else to the people from whom he or she has got the information. Rather than making research any less exploitative, this approach merely tries to compensate for it by 'giving something back'. Ironically, this may benefit the ethnographer, who will feel ethically virtuous, while the informants may be left wondering why they have been given whatever it was they 'got back', and what precisely they got it in return for. Rather than try to redress the inequalities after the event, it would seem better advised to attempt to undertake ethnography that is less exploitative. If ethnography is seen as a process of negotiation and collaboration with informants, through which they too stand to achieve their own objectives, rather than as an act of taking information away from them, the ethical agenda also shifts. By focusing on collaboration and the idea of 'creating something together', agency becomes shared between the researcher and informant. Rather than the researcher being the active party who both extracts data and gives something else back, in this model both researcher and informant invest in, and are rewarded by, the project. Recent work with video and photography shows how these media can be used to develop very successful collaborative projects. In some cases this has empowered informants/subjects and can serve to challenge existing power structures that impinge on the lives of informants and ethnographers. In a project developed by Barnes, Taylor-Brown and Weiner (1997), a group of HIV-positive women collaborated with the researchers to produce a set of video-tapes which contained messages for their children. This use of video allowed the women to represent themselves on video-tapes to be screened in the future. Simultaneously, the agreement allowed the researchers to use the tapes as research materials (see Chapter 4).

As I have suggested above, the concept of 'giving something back' often depends on the idea of ethnography as a 'hit and run' act: the ethnographer spends a number of months in the field gathering 'data' before leaving for home where this data will be written up. Very little remains once ethnographers leave their field sites, apart from (in the case of overseas fieldwork) those domestic and other things that did not fit into a suitcase. Field notes and papers are of little use or interest to most informants, and at any rate researchers may feel these are personal documents. However, video-tapes and photographs are usually of

interest to the people featured in them and the people who were involved in their production. If an ethnographer is working on the 'giving something back' principle, copies of video and photography of individuals and activities that informants value could be an appropriate return for the favours they have performed during fieldwork. However, a collaborative approach to ethnographic image production may do more to redress the inequalities that inevitably exist between informants and researchers. Engelbrecht's collaborative work with ethnographic film shows how visual work can become a product in which both informants and ethnographer invest. Engelbrecht (1996) describes a number of filmmaking projects that involved the collaboration of local people in both filmmaking and editing. In some cases people wanted their traditional festivities or rituals to be documented, and were pleased to work with the filmmakers to achieve these ends. Others realized the commercial potential of their participation in film projects. For example, Engelbrecht notes how the artisans who were represented in her film *Copper Working* participated actively in the film and 'were also thinking of the potential of film as a marketing instrument [for their copper artifacts]' (1996: 167). In this case, the subjects of the film had their own agenda and were able to exploit the project of the filmmakers for their own purposes: 'it was agreed upon that one copy of the film should be given to the local museum exhibiting the best of the recent copper work of the village so as to use it for tourist information' (1996: 167).

A further problem with the notion of 'giving something back' is that it neglects the interlinkages between the researcher's personal autobiographical narrative and the research narrative. Fieldwork, everyday life and writing-up may not necessarily be separated either spatially or temporally in the ethnographer's life and experience (see Chapter 1). Ethnographic research may not entail the researcher going somewhere, taking something away and being morally obliged to 'give something back'. Instead, the ethnography may be part of a researcher's everyday interactions. There may be a continuous flow of information and objects between the ethnographer and informants. This might include the exchange of images, of ideas, emotional and practical exchanges and support, each of which are valued in different ways.

Ownership of research materials

In some cases visual research materials are jointly owned by a set of different parties such as the researcher, informants/subjects, funding bodies, bodies involved in post-production and other institutions and universities or organizations. While researchers may consider their own practices to be ethical, this may be challenged by any joint owners of the photographs or tapes. Such problems may arise if a project is sponsored by an institution that claims ownership of the data, or the project has involved team-work and photographs or video-tapes are joint

possessions of the members of the project team. Moreover, if video or photographic images have been produced in collaboration with informants, the collaborators may wish to use the images in ways that the researcher feels are unethical. To attempt to avoid such problems it is advisable to clarify rights of use and ownership of video and photographic images before their production. This will inevitably bear on the ethical decisions taken during the research and may influence the types of images that are produced. In some cases it is appropriate to use a written agreement that states who will use the video or photographic materials; the purposes for which it will be used; and whether the participants have consented to its use.

Summary

Preparing for ethnographic research is a complex task. It is impossible to predict exactly how fieldwork will proceed and many decisions about using visual methods and the ethical questions they raise are taken during research. Often ethnographers cannot answer the questions that inform the use of photography and video in particular social and cultural contexts, until they have experience of the visual culture and social relationships with which they will be working.

PART 2

PRODUCING KNOWLEDGE

Actually doing fieldwork is a unique and personal experience and while ethnographers may purport to be using the same methods, they will in fact be doing so in different ways. In Chapters 3 and 4 I draw from some of my own and other ethnographers' experiences of doing research with photography and video to offer some ideas and possibilities for a reflexive approach to visual methods. Analysis can take place at any point in the research process, and may be combined with some of the methods described in Chapters 3 and 4. In Chapter 5 I focus more specifically on the storage, analysis and interpretation of research materials.