RESEARCHING THE VISUAL

SECOND EDITION

MICHAEL EMMISON, PHILIP SMITH AND MARGERY MAYALL

RESEARCHING THE VISUAL

INTRODUCING QUALITATIVE METHODS provides a series of volumes which introduce qualitative research to the student and beginning researcher. The approach is interdisciplinary and international. A distinctive feature of these volumes is the helpful student exercises.

One stream of the series provides texts on the key methodologies used in qualitative research. The other stream contains books on qualitative research for different disciplines or occupations. Both streams cover the basic literature in a clear and accessible style, but also cover the 'cutting edge' issues in the area.

For a list of all titles in the series, visit www.sagepub.co.uk/iqm

RESEARCHING THE VISUAL

SECOND EDITION

MICHAEL EMMISON, PHILIP SMITH AND MARGERY MAYALL

SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
3 Church Street
#10-04 Samsung Hub
Singapore 049483

First edition published in 2000. Reprinted in 2002, 2004 and 2007. This edition 2012.

Editor: Katie Metzler
Assistant editor: Anna Horvai
Production editor: Ian Antcliff
Copyeditor: Neville Hankins
Proofreader: Emily Ayers
Marketing manager: Ben Griffin-Sherwood
Cover design: Jennifer Crisp
Typeset by: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd, Chennai, India
Printed by: MPG Books Group, Bodmin, Cornwall

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012939525

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4462-0787-1
ISBN 978-1-4462-0788-8 (pbk)

Contents

List of Figures

List of Exercises and Projects

Acknowledgements

It seems appropriate that we commence the second edition of our text by thanking all those unknown readers who helped make the first edition a success. Your interest in the book convinced us that a second edition was required and we hope you, and a next generation of readers, will find some use in the ideas we express here. As with our first edition we are indebted to a number of colleagues, friends, students and partners for their generous donation of materials, skills and time. We thank in particular Alexander Riley for permission to use two photographs and some unpublished material from his 'Flight 93' research project which appear in Chapter 1. Moritz Eyer supplied us with the 'Ampelmännchen' images from Berlin which appear in Chapter 6, and Janelle Webster allowed us to use some of her tourist photographs from Kenya which appear in Chapter 8. Gioia Rosina and Toni Liu provided us with translations of the inscriptions on the Nambucca Heads breakwater boulders to be found in Figure 5.6. A number of our students agreed to pose for the images in Figure 7.2, and family members were happy to share their photos relating to Facebook profiles which appear in Chapter 8, along with Ian Gillott whose image appears in this chapter. We thank the University of Queensland's Property & Facilities Division for permission to include a number of the poster images from its campus safety initiative – UniSafe – which are found in Chapter 4. Laura Emmison was responsible for much of the graphic design and artwork in the book. Funds from the University of Queensland's School of Social Science supported some of the costs involved in our fieldwork trips to obtain a number of the photographs.

The staff at Sage assisted at all stages of the book's preparation. We thank in particular Katie Metzler for her encouragement in the early months of the project and Anna Horvai for her valuable editorial advice and assistance as the book progressed.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to various people and organizations for kind permission to reproduce the following copyright material:

Figure 3.1 appears courtesy of the New York Academy of Sciences.
Figure 3.2 appears courtesy of the Keystone Agency.

Figure 4.5 appears courtesy of Bill Leak.
Figure 4.6 appears courtesy of Dave Brown.
Figure 8.1 appears courtesy of Linden Lab.

Every effort has been made to trace other copyright holders. We and the publishers would be happy to hear from those we were not able to locate.

About the Authors

Michael Emmison is an Honorary Research Fellow and formerly Reader in Sociology in the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland. In addition to his interests in visual research he has published widely in several fields, most significantly the sociology of culture and language and social interaction. His previous books include *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures* (Cambridge University Press 1999, with Tony Bennett and John Frow) and the edited collection *Calling for Help: Language and Social Interaction in Telephone Helplines.* (John Benjamins 2005, with Carolyn Baker and Alan Firth).

Philip Smith is Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University. He previously worked with Michael Emmison at the University of Queensland. Recent books include *Why War?* (University of Chicago Press 2005), *Punishment and Culture* (University of Chicago Press 2008), *Incivility: The Rude Stranger in Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press 2010, with T. Phillips and R. King) and the edited collection *Interpreting Clifford Geertz* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011, with J. Alexander and M. Norton).

Margery Mayall has degrees in Sociology and Commerce, and worked as a Chartered Accountant before completing a PhD at the University of Queensland, where she is now a Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Social Science. Her research interests include media, financial practices and technology, and she has published a number of articles in venues such as *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*; *Consumption, Markets & Culture*; *Emotion, Space and Society*; and the *Journal of Sociology*.

Preface to the Second Edition

We are delighted to have this opportunity to revise a book that over the years became much more widely used than we had anticipated. In this new preface we want to briefly recapitulate our motives for writing the first edition, to revisit its principal arguments and reflect on the way it has been received by the academic community. We will also suggest some reasons why a new edition is now required and provide an overview of the key changes we have made to this edition.

What the first edition tried to achieve

When the first edition of this book (hereafter RTV1) was conceived by Michael Emmison and Philip Smith in the late 1990s, the practice of visual research was very different from the multi-themed, interdisciplinary field we find today. Although at that time visual research was not exactly in its infancy – for after all episodic initiatives to establish it as a sub-discipline can be found throughout much of the twentieth century – our overall impression was that it was significantly marginalized from the main concerns of the social sciences. This was not just our perception: many of the then leading visual researchers voiced this complaint in one form or another. Visual research has never presented a unitary theoretical or methodological face, so summaries of what it entails are notoriously difficult to make. Nevertheless it appeared to us that the bulk of what then passed as visual inquiry in the social sciences and humanities fell into one of two broad categories. Dramatically oversimplifying, one branch stemming from the Anglo-Saxon traditions of ethnography and social anthropology promoted the use of the camera in the generation of a visual record of the research setting. The second branch, one with closer affinities to the continental schools of semiotics and cultural studies, advocated the investigation of commercially produced images. These were generally media texts of one kind or another that were

taken to contain implicit ideological messages. Both of these approaches appeared to us to have limitations. Those championing the generation of photographs (and occasionally film) generally lacked clear theoretical aims for this practice and utilized their images – still and moving – in a purely illustrative way. At the end of the day these images and films were clearly subordinate to the written component of any research report. Those advocating the decoding of media texts were generally strong on (front-end) theory but often paid scant regard to the methodological conventions of the social sciences and were notoriously indifferent to matters such as sample size and the limitations on the inferences that could be made. Of course there were some notable exceptions in each of these branches and we duly acknowledged these in the book. But overall it appeared to us that social science academics who worked with visual materials had been largely 'ghettoized'. Further, this was partly their own fault. They were communicating with each other about a relatively narrow range of issues of little interest to the wider community of researchers.

As a path towards building a more vigorous programme of visual research, we introduced a novel way of thinking about the concept of visual data. This sought to clarify the status of 'the visual' as an empirical domain. The core feature of this new approach was the suggestion that we should move beyond the two-dimensional photographic image which had hitherto largely dominated agendas, and embrace a much more extensive conception of the visual aspects of social and cultural life. A necessary corollary was that we needed to bring in a much wider range of tools and data sources as 'visual research methods' than the familiar camera and photograph.

RTV1 was thus something of a hybrid in that it steered a path between offering a theoretical account of the principal currents in visual inquiry and their limitations, and a discussion of the wider methodological approaches and research questions that visual researchers might draw upon. Our starting point was to rethink 'data', the empirical stuff that is at the centre of visual inquiry. We did not reject the study of or use of photographs – as some of our critics have claimed – but called for photographs to be recognized as just one kind of data. They were just part of the wider category which we referred to as the 'two-dimensional' – a group which also included various media elements such as magazine advertisements, billboards, cartoons, as well the ubiquitous information posters, instructional diagrams and directional signs which we readily encounter in our daily lives.

But thinking of visual inquiry even as the collection and study of these diverse various two-dimensional surfaces seemed unduly restrictive. What about objects? We proposed that visual research should also recognize the existence of three-dimensional data. We had in mind here the parts of material culture which operate as purposive or accidental signifiers in social life.

These ranged from the items of everyday life in the home which carry personal meanings to those in public spaces, such as statues, which represent official public discourses. Our argument was that such objects provide a rich vein of visual information which can be read for clues about selves and societies. We soon realized also that while such forms of data can be analysed in traditional semiotic terms, they are also implicated in human actions. Exploring how people react towards, use and modify these items was therefore an important research issue as well.

Pushing further down this analytical path we argued that the physical spaces and places in which humans conducted their social lives – domestic homes, educational institutions, shopping malls, boardrooms, as well as larger geographical spaces – parks, city centres and the like – could also be amenable to visual inquiry, and especially observational sociology. Finally, of course, these spaces and places were generally populated by humans in interaction and this in turn provided us with a further analytic category of data. People are 'living visual data' and we can therefore study how they signal to each other. What is loosely termed 'people watching' can offer a way to answer diverse questions about the ordering of human interaction.

So the core focus of RTV1 was to tease out the differences between these – and other – types of visual data, and to demonstrate with numerous examples and research exercises their relevance for conventional sociological research. In so doing we reconstructed a field of visual research that was far wider in scope and also far more developed than had previously been imagined in sociology as a discipline.

What the second edition adds

We welcome the opportunity to revisit the themes of RTV1 in this new edition of our book. We have, however, revised our treatment. Fat has been trimmed. We have retained classic theoretical statements and exemplary studies, both famous and obscure, but have removed some optional and illustrative material that now appears dated. This has been replaced with more contemporary references. Our theoretical gambit having served its purpose, we have also moderated our tone with regard to the use of photography as a research tool. Published reviews and critiques of our work were important here, and we thank our interlocutors for helping us to reflect a little more on the possible benefits of photography for the research process (Wagner, 2002; Pink, 2007; Prosser, 2008).

More importantly the new edition provides us with an opportunity to extend our analytical gaze in a number of new directions. In the decade or

so since RTV1 was published there have been numerous significant developments in the visual culture of modern societies. By far the most notable of these has been the exponential growth of the Internet with its wealth of non-textual data and non-textual communicative options. Sites such as YouTube, Flickr, Second Life and Facebook have millions of users and contributors. They are both part of our social landscape and an irresistible source of limitless, free data. In response to this seismic shift we have added a new author to the team with expertise in this particular field: Margery Mayall has conducted research on online share trading, markets and the role of visual fields and visual information in this process. Drawing on this background, she has been largely responsible for an entirely new chapter dealing with what we term 'virtual visual data'.

In addition there have been important technological advances in the practice of visual research. The decreased costs of video recording and the availability of editing software have seen an explosion in experimental or multimedia ethnographic techniques. This has also impacted on ethnomethodological work investigating the organization of naturally occurring social interaction in minute detail. Photo-manipulation software such as Photoshop has allowed experimental designs to be more precisely targeted and far cheaper to implement. We treat these new developments as needed. Finally we note that some fields of visual research have become more popular than ever. For example, in working on our revisions we noted a growing interest in photo-elicitation, auto-photography and on the coding in situ of graffiti. Whereas we had to scratch around before to find credible work in this genre to illustrate research possibilities, today we could pick and choose from numerous high-quality studies. Where we sensed a field had grown or moved on in such a way, we expanded our treatment. Where there has been little change (e.g. in the semiotic decoding of advertisements, in the study of parks and plazas) we have retained about the same volume of coverage as before.

One final trend we have observed over the past 13 years has been a growing concern with ethical issues in qualitative research generally and in visual research in particular. Concerns about privacy, about the appropriate capture and use of images, about spying and snooping, about manipulation and deception, and about generating fear in research subjects have all grown in magnitude. RTV1 tended to avoid or brush aside ethical issues. Today this is not an option. Nor is it desirable. Accordingly we have a new and dedicated chapter written largely by Margery Mayall that places ethical themes squarely up front. We have also provided ethical warning signs in the suggested exercises scattered throughout the book. Finally we have retained a large number of 'observation-only' exercises where ethical concerns are likely to exist in a diminished form. These may well provide a resource for students who do not have the time to pass through any required ethical clearance process.

Over the last decade the marketplace for books on 'visual research' has become crowded and competitive with a number of full-length treatments of the entire field of visual techniques as well as a number of more specialist texts devoted to particular methods, approaches and technologies. We review some of this material in Chapter 3. Nevertheless, there is, in our opinion, still no other book which attempts to do what *Researching the Visual* does. It conceptualizes visual data in a more all-embracing way than the other texts do, as well as exploring the connections between the more restricted field of image-based visual inquiry and analytical approaches grounded in traditional observation-based methodological techniques.

Because our book engages with the topic of visual inquiry in this distinctive way it is helpful to point out at the beginning, in summary form, what the reader will find in the chapters which follow.

What this book does do

- We provide an overview of the various forms of visual data that are available for social research by bringing together in one accessible text a variety of approaches and perspectives which have previously been unconnected.
- We broaden the concerns of visual research to include issues of visibility, invisibility, surveillance and presentation of the self, in addition to established understandings which centre on the study of the image.
- We offer an approach which is grounded in both social science and cultural inquiry. We anticipate that this book will be of most relevance to researchers in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, cultural and media studies, geography and urban studies. There are also scattered themes and ideas that will be of interest to those in history, political science, economics, environmental science, criminology, psychology, and art and design.
- We suggest numerous small-scale, low-budget exercises and projects that students can undertake. Some involve pure interpretation, others involve testing a hypothesis. **Exercises** are generally activities which can be completed in an hour or so by an individual student. They are intended to be thought-provoking as opposed to formal explorations of an issue. Exercises can often form the basis of a tutorial, with material collected or reflected upon during these activities being used to generate group discussion on methods and findings. **Projects**, on the other hand, will require a longer time to complete and are often best accomplished by a group of students. A project involves collecting data using systematic sampling and recording techniques and often involves testing a hypothesis or resolving a puzzle derived from the literature. For these reasons many projects could be expanded in scope and sophistication to form the basis of a thesis or a published article. Many of the exercises and projects which we have retained for the revised edition of the book have been updated, and further suggestions about such things as research design, tips on data collection and analysis have been added.

- Where possible we point to links between the kinds of data we discuss with social and cultural theory. This will demonstrate the rich theoretical heritage available to visual inquiry and enable researchers to conduct projects that have a strong analytic purpose. We are particularly concerned to show how visual data can be used as an indicator with which to explore somewhat abstract theoretical ideas.

What this book does not do

- While we devote some space to the analysis of photographs and images, much of this book will be given over to other visual resources and data forms, such as objects, places and people. We certainly do not claim to offer an exhaustive treatment on what to do with photographs. Other texts are available which provide these skills (see e.g. Banks, 2007; Pink 2007; Pauwels and Margolis, 2011).
- We do not claim to provide specialist knowledge about how to take photographs or produce a video. Nor do we provide lengthy classifications of types of image and the ways in which visual language works. We are also unable to address important debates about the philosophy, psychology and physiology of perception which consider how the brain processes visual information.
- The analysis of moving images requires a detailed exposition of techniques that is beyond the scope of this text. Consequently, we will pass over the analysis of film and television material. Studies of kinesics likewise generally make use of videotapes of human movements and gestures. We provide only a brief discussion of this field and suggest some simple projects which do not require this technology.
- We also do not treat the analysis of artworks or themes of social iconicity and iconic power (e.g. Alexander et al., 2012). This is a growing and often somewhat subjective and philosophical field that sits at the interface of sociology and the humanities. However, we do mention some recent studies in this tradition that are closer to conventional semiotic readings of signs and objects.
- We will not go through basic methodological issues like sampling techniques, coding sheets, displaying and writing up results, remaining unobtrusive, staying out of danger. Again these are covered in numerous other methods texts (e.g. Bryman, 2012). When we suggest exercises we often rely on common sense for our readers to develop protocols that will make these tractable in the field.
- The book is intended for the most part as a student text. It also offers seasoned academics a way to get up to speed on visual methods and to think about visuality in social life. We do not claim to be constructing a profound new theory of the visual nor a pathbreaking method for studying visual materials. We do claim, however, some originality for our argument that visual research should expand in scope and theoretical orientation beyond the study of photographs. We also see the organization of this book as a modest innovation. In so far as we show there is extreme and unexpected diversity in visual research and data, imposing some kind of order on the field is of great importance. The conceptual categories informing the division of material in the five core chapters provide a noteworthy initial step in accomplishing this task.

1

A Very Short Introduction: The Scope of Visual Research

After reading our preface you might still be in the dark. What do we understand by visual research? What is its range? What exactly is this book about? Perhaps the most efficient way to answer these three questions is in the concrete rather than the abstract. So we turn to a study by Alexander Riley that recently appeared in the journal *Visual Studies*. In it, Riley (2008) explores the aftermath of the crash of United Airlines Flight 93. This was one of four airliners that were hijacked on the morning of September 11, 2001. As a result of the efforts of a number of passengers and crew in fighting back, Flight 93 did not reach its intended target – believed to be the Capitol Building or the White House – but crashed instead into a wooded field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, killing all on board. Much less attention has been given to the crash site of Flight 93 compared with that lavished on Ground Zero, the site of the World Trade Center in New York, or to the Pentagon – the targets of the three other terrorist airliners. The World Trade Center footage in particular offers powerful confirmation of the role of iconic images in contemporary culture. Still, Riley suggests that Shanksville offers equally compelling material for the visual sociologist.

Riley's theoretical approach is derived from neo-Durkheimian insights into the role of symbols in the construction of culture. More particularly his aim is to discover 'precisely how sacredness is constructed from the events of Flight 93' (Riley, 2008: 4). He starts with an examination of what we term an item of 'two-dimensional' data: the so-called 'End of Serenity' photograph. The photograph (subject to copyright but still easily found on the Internet) was taken by a local Shanksville resident, Val McClatchey, some moments after the crash. The scene depicted in the photograph is not that of the crash site per se but something perhaps even more evocative. McClatchey's photograph captures what Riley describes as a 'picturesque

country scene from a mythical American rural past' (p. 5). Under a clear blue sky stand red barns on gently sloping green pastures, but disturbing this image of sacred pastoral harmony is an element of profanity – the black cloud of smoke from the burning wreckage of the aircraft rising ominously behind the distant line of trees.

Riley makes a semiotic and narrative reading of the End of Serenity. He works out what it means and what its implications might be. His argument is that the End of Serenity photograph has the effect of turning the events of 9/11 into a more fundamental attack on the wider American cultural tradition, with its connections to pastoral tranquillity. In his view it matters little that this is largely a fictional narrative or that the countryside was not the intended target of attack. As he puts it, 'The narrative power of the image draws on facts larger than those of mere logic and reason' (p. 6).

Surprisingly the End of Serenity is the *only* example of two-dimensional data that Riley includes in his article and the only photographic image he sets out to explain per se. For the most part he is concerned with describing the various efforts that have been made to memorialize the tragic-yet-heroic end of Flight 93. In this task he uses photographs only in an illustrative way. Riley focuses on two of these efforts: first an abandoned church located several miles from the crash site which, at the initiative of a priest named Alphonse Mascherino, was transformed into a memorial chapel; and second a temporary memorial which was erected on a hilltop overlooking the crash site approximately a quarter of a mile below. Riley's discussion dwells primarily on the civil religious symbolism which he uncovers through his cultural investigation of the two sites (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). For example, hanging outside the memorial chapel is a large bell bearing the title 'Thunder Bell: voice of flight 93' which he interprets as a direct reference to the Old Testament story of God (Yahweh) summoning Moses to the top of Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments. Inside the chapel the altar has been constructed to resemble the US Capitol Building, to honour the presumed target of the hijacked airliner. The closer temporary memorial features a 40 foot long by 9 foot high (about 12 m by 3 m) steel fence on which are now draped numerous objects left by visitors and chosen for their association with the flight – uniforms worn by the emergency workers, medals, other items of clothing bearing messages of sympathy for, and identification with, the passenger and crew, personal possessions deposited as gifts and 'many, many American flags'. Riley observes that the length of the fence was chosen to symbolize the 40 passengers on board, a count which significantly does not include the four suspected hijackers.

Riley offers an imaginative reading of these assorted things, taking them to be symbols through which he can reconstruct myth-making activity. We wish to draw your attention to their ontological status. In claiming that they represent examples of 'three-dimensional' visual data we want to highlight the fact that the objects Riley decodes exist ontologically in their own right.

Figure 1.1 The temporary memorial fence at Shanksville, PA (photo courtesy of Alexander Riley)

Because in his article Riley includes several photographs of the memorials, this fact is occluded. Yet in contrast to the End of Serenity, the memorial objects have an existence which transcends the photographic records he has made of them. We need a photograph of the End of Serenity in order to study it. We do not need a photograph of the Shanksville memorials to make sense of them as we could also visit the site to look at them, to investigate their display or count themes, to see what people do with them – these would also be a visual social inquiry. As material culture with which people can interact, the memorial objects can be understood as having their own 'social life' as things (Appadurai, 1988). The memorabilia placed on or near the temporary steel fence are continually changing as waves of visitors seek to record evidence of their encounter with the site. National Parks Service employees periodically remove items from the fence to create more space for new visitors but all items are stored and will be put on display once the proposed permanent memorial is completed. Well over 1 million people have visited the temporary memorial since its inception. Here we have a lot of material for visual analysis.

In the final section of his published article Riley turns to the controversy over a permanent memorial at the crash site. The central feature of the design, created by an architectural firm from Los Angeles, was to comprise

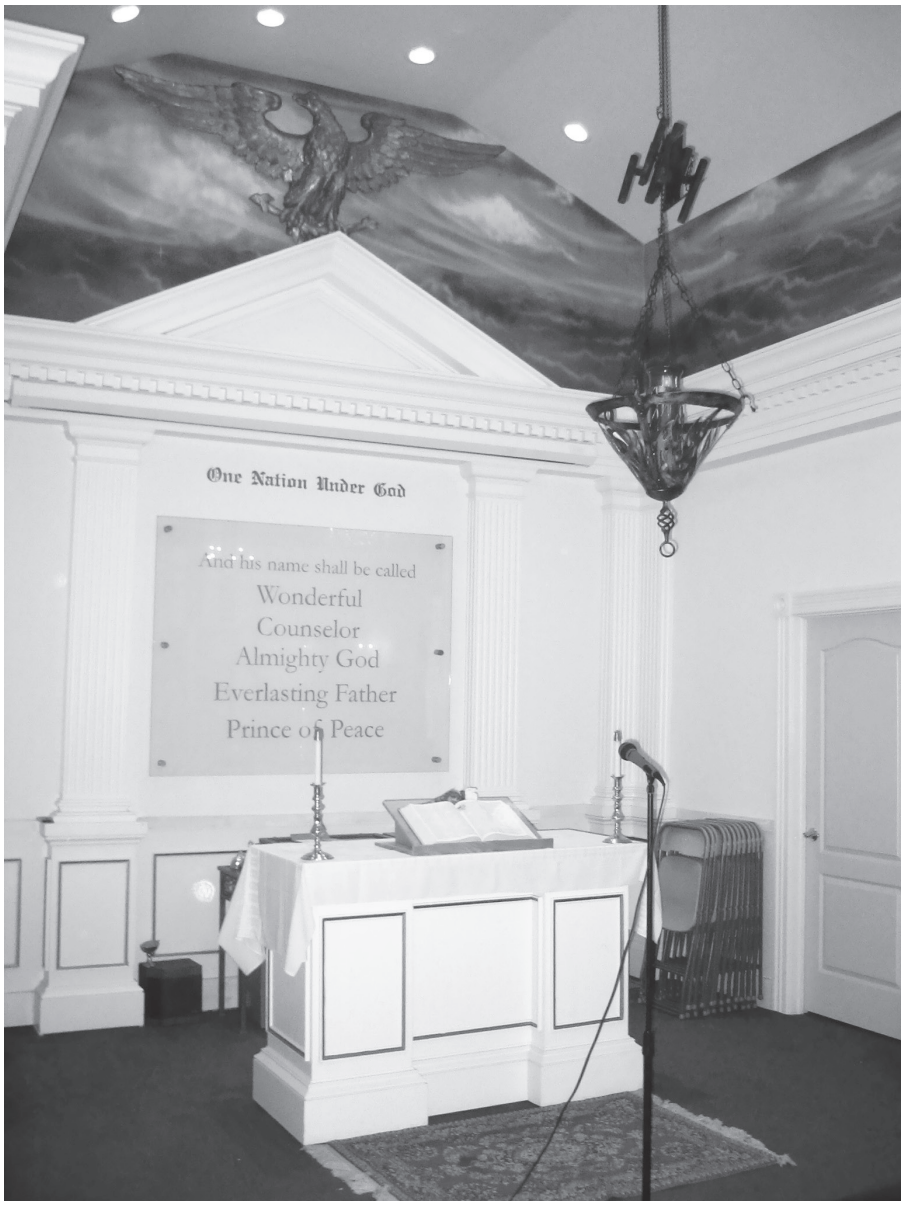


Figure 1.2 The altar in the memorial chapel at Shanksville, PA (photo courtesy of Alexander Riley)

a large crescent-shaped array of maple trees that would border a black slate wall with the planting to follow the existing land contours. Critics and conspiracy theorists were quick to suggest that it contained coded Islamic themes: that the memorial design was little more than a celebration of the crescent moon and star, traditional symbols of Islamic faith and which are

included on the national flag of a number of Muslim-majority countries. Pushing this dispute to one side, we suggest that when it is completed the memorial will constitute a third level of visual data, referred to in the book as 'Lived visual data'. By this term we want to suggest that the built environment – the buildings, locales and physical spaces that we inhabit – constitute a form of 'lived text' which can be investigated to uncover insights into cultural values and norms, insights which are generally not available to social researchers through more conventional forms of data. The majority of settings which make up the built environment – shopping malls, hospitals, museums, schools and universities, and even the humble suburban home and garden – are innocuous and their design seldom engenders any public comment let alone the kind of controversy that the 'Crescent of Embrace' gave rise to. However, paying close attention to the way these everyday spaces and locales are organized and the assumptions they encode about such things as privacy, taken-for-granted gender roles, civilization, hierarchy and progress is a valuable possibility for the visual researcher. We consider these themes in Chapter 6.

At the time of writing, Riley's book on Flight 93 has yet to be published. However, we have read the manuscript. There he refers to yet another aspect of social life that we feel is amenable to visual inquiry. This is the movement and activity of people. We refer to this as 'Living Visual Data' in Chapter 7. Riley noticed that at Shanksville people were respectful and serious. There were relatively few conversations. Moreover, photography and videotaping were rare. He contrasts this demeanour with the more crass touristic behaviours to be found at the World Trade Center crash site. The meanings of the sites and the kind of people who visited them seemed to be objectively reflected in behaviours. Later in this book we suggest ways that such ordinary behaviours can be systematically investigated through observation, coding and low-key experiments. For example, the argument that the World Trade Center site is now understood as a global tourist experience and Shanksville is a pilgrimage might be tested through a comparative observational research design that codes and counts particular human behaviours and interactions.

Finally we might point to Shanksville's presence on the Internet. Here it exists as what we call 'Virtual Visual Data' in Chapter 8. Riley himself made use of the Internet to trace the beliefs of conspiracy theorists – people who could not find reputable publishers for their views. True enough on photograph and video sharing sites such as YouTube, we can find a large volume of conspiracy materials, but there are also a range of ordinary commemorative images. These offer researchers further opportunities. What do people consider worth posting online? What aspects of the Flight 93 memorial might be selected as interesting by people from different national backgrounds? What about those with varying demographics? More generally do people represent Flight 93 with reference to its tragic or heroic narration?

In Chapter 8 we suggest ways that Internet sources can be used for systematic visual sociology.

Flight 93 is, we suggest, a fascinating and thought-provoking example of the kind of options that are open to the visual researcher. Put simply we can:

- Look at images, objects, built environments, interactions and behaviours using visual research methods. Visual sociology is about so much more than just the analysis of photographs.
- Treat each of these in a hermeneutic way as something to be read for encoded deep meanings, or simply taken in a more positivistic sense as an indicator of more diffuse social processes and beliefs. Visual research as a field is not defined by any methodological or theoretical presuppositions. It simply explains or makes use of that which is visual, visible and therefore observable, or visually regulated.

Finally let us turn to the contents of this book chapter by chapter. Chapter 2 looks at ethics. We talk through some of the common ethical concerns that confront visual researchers and introduce some familiar protocols for resolving these. Chapter 3 cuts to the disciplinary core. For those of you wishing to understand what is most commonly understood by the terms 'visual sociology', 'visual research' and 'visual methods' this should be your first port of call. Here we review the uses of photographs in research as a means of recording research settings, eliciting information and generating reflexivity. After reading this chapter you will be part of the conversation. Chapter 4 opens up the use of two-dimensional (2D) data more widely. It begins our attempt to expand the referents of 'visual sociology' beyond the photograph in less recognized directions. We suggest that posters, maps, signs, cartoons and advertisements all offer opportunities for creative and innovative research. Chapter 5 is all about objects. We suggest that this three-dimensional (3D) visual data or material culture can be read for meanings. Further it can also offer an unobtrusive measure of various social processes. For example, we show that tombstones and statues provide a way to explore themes related to social inclusion and exclusion over time. Chapter 6 looks at the spaces people inhabit. We think of these as 'lived visual data'. We show that the seemingly functional design of houses and hospitals in fact reflects societal norms and taken-for-granted expectations. We can explore these visually through in situ observation or the analysis of architectural plans. Chapter 7 investigates people in interaction. We demonstrate that ordinary social life is regulated by visual cues; that people signal to each other; and that patterns of association offer a resource for the objective observation of public spaces. Our final chapter, Chapter 8, looks at the Internet. We explain the opportunities and challenges this provides, point to some interesting recent studies and suggest some feasible research projects that can be undertaken with what we term 'virtual visual data'.

2

Ethics in Visual Research

This chapter will:

- Discuss the ethical considerations which are an important part of all research.
- Highlight issues which are of particular importance for visual research.
- Introduce a coding system which is used throughout this book as a quick and easy guide for thinking about ethics in visual research.

Ethical concerns are an important part of all good research, and should be present from the moment you start considering any research project or exercise. However, if you do a cursory inspection of the layout of many of the numerous books on the market specializing in social research methods, you may notice an interesting pattern. Ethics is all too often included as a chapter at the end of a text – almost as an afterthought – after the far more interesting nitty-gritty of theory and method. Sometimes, ethics is not even afforded its own chapter. Instead, a perusal of book indexes finds ethical issues scattered throughout the texts or, sometimes, not even included at all.

What message do you think this is sending to the readers of these books? At a time when many societies are experiencing increased social rights awareness, greater participation by citizens in moral and ethical debates, and a profusion of legislation and litigation in relation to individual and social group rights, is it a good idea to ignore or downplay ethics?

Our own previous edition was guilty of not devoting specific attention to ethics as a fundamental characteristic of visual research. It may be easy, as you read through many of the exercises and projects that we include in this book, to wonder how and why the general public (or university ethics committees) could possibly have any concerns with some of the activities if they appear as innocuous as walking the dog, unobtrusively counting people interacting with

statues, or looking through publicly available websites. Of course, sometimes they do not. But until you have considered the moral, legal and practical challenges and responsibilities that may be involved in doing research, then you should not even begin to start your own empirical investigations.

In this chapter, we discuss the general principles which should apply to all social research. We then look more specifically at the ethical issues which are relevant for the various types of visual research discussed in this book, including a section devoted to the Internet. Finally, we will detail a visual coding system which we have used throughout this book, to help you understand quickly and easily what sort of ethical issues may arise in each of the exercises and projects we have included. These symbols should cause you to stop and reflect. They will help you to understand that even the act of seeing comes with responsibilities; that the active researcher has to be able to justify his or her actions; and that a little bit of forethought can later save time, money or – at worst – a legal imbroglio!

General ethical considerations

Research ethics is fundamentally about two very important issues:

- Acting with integrity.
- Respecting the rights of others.

Ethics is also about timing. In research, the best time to consider ethics is:

- Before you start researching (Preparation).
- While you are researching (Fieldwork).
- When you are analysing and presenting the results of your research (Post Research Phase).

In other words, there is no time when you should not be alert to the possibility of issues arising, regardless of whether you are doing a small assignment for a university course, or a large-scale project for a well-funded organization.

We cannot include an exhaustive manual of ethical issues and situations, because technology and society are constantly changing and new challenges will continue to emerge. Also, although there tends to be agreement among the research community at a general level about what ethics involves, there has been and will continue to be considerable debate about the details (for instance, the question of what constitutes informed consent in certain situations). Add to this the fact that legal obligations differ from country to country, and ethical regulations vary between institutions, and you may start wondering whether it is possible at all to be definitive when considering ethics! But do not despair. The key, as Rose Wiles et al. (2008) note, is to

Table 2.1 Most common ethical issues to consider when undertaking research

Ethical Issue	Description	Discussion
Informed consent	Participants involved in research should have the right to voluntarily participate – and to understand exactly what they are participating in	This principle usually involves participants in research being advised of the nature and purpose of the study, and informed of their rights about participation, including the right not to participate. Consent forms are often provided. However, as noted in this chapter, the issue of when consent is required is not always clear cut. A famous example of research which has been criticized for not obtaining consent is Laud Humphreys' (1975) work on homosexual encounters in public toilets
Absence of harm	All steps should be taken to avoid the possibility of harm to the participants and the researcher/s – whether physical, psychological, legal, financial, or any other foreseeable type of harm	It is usual to do a risk assessment analysis prior to research to ensure that all possible harm – to either participant or researcher – is minimized. Researchers should think laterally as risk does not just include direct physical harm, and consequences may occur even after the research is finished. For example, poorly worded comments made in a research report about observed activities, which is then available to the study participants, may cause psychological distress if the participants perceive that they are being judged negatively
Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality	All precautions should be taken to ensure that participants' privacy is protected, identifying information should be anonymized, and confidentiality and security of information should be prioritized	When considering how to protect the privacy of individuals, think about not just anonymizing their names but also any other information which could identify them, such as Internet monikers or specific details about a small group or community in which they operate. All information should also be stored securely, whether physically and/or electronically
Deception	A grey area; the general principle is that lies or deception in research should always be avoided unless there are valid and justifiable theoretical or methodological reasons for their use	What constitutes deception is a debatable topic – some would argue that observation without acknowledging your role would constitute deception, whereas others are more concerned with deliberate manipulation in order to obtain data. An example of a researcher who declared the necessity of using deception in certain situations is Goode (1996), who studied the responses to bogus advertisements he placed in a personal column. He argued that he would not have had valid data if he had declared his interest in the research, and that there was minimal risk or negative impacts on the respondents. The important consideration is the effect on parties to the research because of any practices which may be seen as deceptive
Vulnerable populations	Some populations have special needs or considerations which mean that extra care should be taken when doing research	Examples of this would include research involving children or mentally incapacitated hospital patients, which may require the consent of guardians; or the situation where particular indigenous groups may be hostile to approaches if not done in culturally appropriate ways

consider the fundamental issues, and then to be able to justify your decisions based upon the contexts.

Alex Broom (2006: 152) notes three basic considerations which are usually taken into consideration when deciding if a project is ethical. The first is a concern with the people who are the participants in a research study. Their rights, well-being and self-respect should not be negatively impacted upon during the course of the research. Secondly, the researcher's right to a safe and respectful working environment should be considered. Finally, Broom notes that research should be planned to ensure that it does not breach collective standards of justice: for example, undue pressures should not be placed intentionally on relatively neglected groups in society.

In Table 2.1 on the previous page we summarise the most common ethical considerations that have been identified by authors such as Babbie (2010) and Neuman.

Along with these general fundamentals, the researcher also has to consider any particular requirements or obligations which must be satisfied, in relation to the institutions and environments in which he or she will be working. University students reading this book will be aware that tertiary institutions usually have proscribed ethical standards to which students and staff are expected to adhere; they also have ethical committees which review and approve (or not) planned research projects. While many undergraduate class activities and projects – such as the ones mentioned in this book – may not require formal approval, you should try to ensure that you are complying with the requirements and guidelines as laid out by your institution.

University Ethical Guidelines

Through an Internet search of your university website, you can generally find the organization responsible for ethical guidelines. It is variously called the Ethical Clearance Board, the Internal Review Board, the Human Subjects Committee, or something similar depending on the institution. That website should contain instructions on the sorts of projects that require clearance and those that do not. It should also contain examples of the forms that you may need to fill in, and the questions you will need to answer concerning themes like 'harm to subjects', 'anonymity' and 'informed consent'. The process is rarely as difficult as it looks at first, and most organizations have helpful staff who can walk you through the process and answer many of your questions before you submit your application.

Another important consideration is the regulatory and social environment in the region or country in which you are working. Projects which comply with all ethical standards in one country may fall foul of institutionalized expectations in another country. For instance, the personal safety of female

participants or researchers may be compromised in regions where women's rights are not well recognized. Alternatively, older men taking video footage at a public beach or swimming pool populated by large numbers of young children are engaged in a problematic venture. This is due to concerns about paedophila in many Western societies. The legal and financial implications of research need also to be taken into account. Avid photographers may be aware of the increasingly complex requirements relating to informed consent for the use of people's images in photographs, and the potential to be sued in certain circumstances if recognizable images are published in the absence of someone's express permission.

Researchers should also be alert to potential conflicts of interest or undue pressures which they may face from collaborators in the research process. At a student level, the pressure to do well in an assignment should not override the primary responsibility to do ethical research. At a broader level, sponsors of research projects (such as private companies or government departments) may try and put implicit or explicit pressure on a researcher – such as limits placed on how the research is to be done, or the desire to suppress findings which appear to adversely impact the organization. Integrity and forethought are thus necessary to help prevent unpleasant situations like these, or if they do arise to manage them in a manner which will not compromise your ethical obligations and reputation as a researcher.

All these warnings may seem ominous. Indeed, to some commentators (e.g. Haggerty, 2004; Dingwall, 2006) 'ethics creep' by research ethics boards is a worrying trend at universities, with evermore areas of social science research subject to scrutiny and restrictions, potentially to the detriment of innovative or alternative methods of study. But take heart. While almost all research situations require consideration of ethical issues, most can still be resolved quickly, satisfactorily or ingeniously if you are a conscientious student or researcher.

Now, let us consider the particular issues you may need to think about when you are researching the visual ...

Contextual issues – visual research

One of the chief advantages of the visual research which we often advocate in this book is that, unlike many other forms of social research (such as the survey or interview, or 'mainstream' photographic visual research), direct interaction with people and the need to elicit responses from them is often eliminated. Instead, information is gathered by observation: directly (such as sitting in a public space watching the waiting behaviour of train travellers) or indirectly (e.g. counting and coding visual data obtained from advertisements in magazines or from photographs on public websites).

In theory, removing direct interactions with people and engaging instead with what we can see could remove many of the ethical obstacles to research, such as intruding on vulnerable populations or requiring consent from large samples. Also, as writers such as Babbie (2010) note, the results of this type of research may be more reliable because of the reduced likelihood of participant responses or reactions being affected by the presence of a researcher. Thus, unobtrusive visual techniques were often labelled by early writers as 'nonreactive' research (Webb et al., 1973).

However, a polluting label can also be applied. The term 'covert' is often applied to many of the observational techniques described in this book where people are directly or indirectly involved, and the propriety of such unobtrusive research is the subject of much debate. Gillian Rose (2007) points out that covert research is generally not considered acceptable unless specific circumstances warrant it, for it constitutes deceit in that the subjects being watched or the creators of the material being studied are unaware of the research and are given no opportunity to consent to it. Sarah Pink (2007) goes further in suggesting that in the case of taking clandestine photographic or video images, it is neither ethically appropriate nor methodologically sound, as people cannot explain or provide a context for the phenomenon being studied.

As will be discussed in the following chapters, the latter criticism takes a very particular view of the use of images, and is not relevant for many of the suggestions for visual research discussed in this book. The object of research is not always to conduct a specific case study of a phenomenon and explain it contextually. For example, observing or photographing and then quantifying particular characteristics in a large population, such as gender differences in seating arrangements, may be all that is required for a study of patterns of use or to triangulate or validate the results of previous inquiries.

The charge of deceit is somewhat more contentious, and a grey area constantly being debated by social scientists (see e.g. the work of Goode, 1996, or Calvey, 2008). At issue are potentially contrasting objectives: gaining consent, preserving anonymity and/or avoiding harm or distress, versus obtaining relevant research data unaffected by the intrusion of a researcher into the setting. At one end of the scale, techniques such as content analysis of publicly available images, such as newspaper photographs, are commonly used and attract less debate in the social sciences. By contrast, a researcher taking videos of people in the same public places as the newspaper photographs may attract considerable consternation in terms of consent, and how the images will be used.

Douglas Harper (2005), focusing on photography in public life, acknowledges that there will be times when it may not be sensitive or normative to take or use photographs. However, he charges that for visual research to be optimized, 'the right to document life in glaring exactitude' (Harper, 2005: 760) needs to be recognized. Wiles et al. (2008) take an holistic approach in discussing the use of images generated by various parties, arguing that the contexts of and for the research should guide the use of images, and they

make practical suggestions for alleviating many ethical anxieties. Even in this book, you will note some of the ways that the use of images – and thus, ethical concerns – can be managed. For instance, in Chapter 8 we have reproduced pictures using consenting participants to demonstrate a point, rather than copying original Facebook display profiles; in some chapters we describe the phenomenon rather than reproduce it; and often we note that it is the aggregated and anonymized data which are of interest and to be reported, rather than individual video or photographic images.

Apart from the issue of using images, covert research may not always be unobtrusive. For example, students planning to test some of Harold Garfinkel's (1967) work by engaging in breaching experiments are intending to deliberately upset certain expected social norms. Some people may experience unease at this behaviour, time may be wasted, and deception is certainly involved. Even when not deliberately upsetting social norms, the act of posing in a certain role without acknowledging your research objectives (such as walking a dog in order to observe people's reactions to it) would constitute a form of deceit. The researcher therefore has to decide: at what point does 'primacy of authenticity' (Prosser and Loxley, 2008: 52) take priority over various ethical considerations such as consent? This dilemma may not always be able to be solved, but by taking into account the contexts of each situation, considering the basic requirements of good ethical practice as discussed in this chapter, and ensuring that your data remain secure and confidential, you can usually engage in justifiable visual research – albeit sometimes in interesting or entertaining ways!

Using the Internet ethically

The rise of the Internet has added to the ethical debates being waged. Significant advantages of the Web include the ever-growing volume of data available, and the ease with which they can often be accessed (Pauwels, 2008: 45). It theoretically alleviates the necessity of interacting with people at all, instead offering a feast of existing data ready for the enthusiastic visual researcher.

However, the rapid growth of the Internet has created its own ethical issues, as people have struggled to clarify its role in everyday life and its place in research. As James Hudson and Amy Bruckman (2004: 127) put it, 'traditionally, research ethics relies on distinctions such as public versus private spaces, identified versus anonymous individuals, and published versus unpublished information. However, online, these categories become blurred'. With the advent, particularly, of Web 2.0, there has been an explosion of information online which tests the boundaries as never before. F. Girardin et al. (2008: 83) note the increasing amount of sensitive or intimate information which people knowingly reveal online through blogs, videos, images and various sites. However, Bettina Hoser and Tanja Nitschke (2010: 181) caution that many users do so without a full understanding of the characteristics of the technology they are using – which may mean limited comprehension

of potential repercussions. In addition to self-disclosure, the ubiquity of webcams in all sorts of locations (some obvious, but many not), and the multitude of other data-gathering tools available, mean that all sorts of individual and aggregated visual data can be found online without the knowledge of those whose information or images have been included.

Matters such as privacy, protecting identities and the use of sensitive information thus have the potential to become vexing issues. One of the most contentious methods of research is 'lurking', a Net-specific term which refers to the act of entering a website or interactive system, observing the interactions there, but with no or limited participation. It is commonplace – many newcomers to a group will, for example, lurk for a while in order to learn the cultural conventions of a site or to ascertain whether they wish to join in. However, as early as 2001, Gunther Eysenbach and James Till noted that it was a practice which bred potential resentment: while researchers may liken lurking to analysing any sort of publicly available matter such as letters to newspapers, people participating or publishing on the Web may be operating under the mistaken belief that they are engaged in private activity that nobody else can see uninvited (2001: 1103–1104).

This has added to the debate about the best way of determining issues of consent and privacy on the Internet, and how to represent information in a way which does not violate anonymity and sensitivity. Eysenbach and Till, along with other commentators (e.g. Bassett and O'Riordan, 2002; Hookway, 2008), advise that decisions should be based on each specific context, using general criteria designed to minimize ethical concerns. As research has developed, these criteria have included such considerations as whether a site or activity is accessible to the general public; whether members of sites or activities have waived the right to privacy; to what use the data is being put; and how the data is being presented. For example, when discussing the use of data from webcams, Dallen Timothy and David Groves (2001) suggest that if it is aggregated and generalized in such a way as to avoid individual identification, then it is consistent with pre-Internet data-collection guidelines. Bruckman (2002) also advised that the likely degree of potential harm should guide how research projects are planned and conducted, and proposes guidelines for disguising any identifiable material.

Surveillance creep versus ethics creep

That there should be ethical standards is in no doubt. Past examples of notorious social science research – such as the Humphreys investigation of homosexual encounters in public toilets (1975), or the Milgram 'electric shock' deference to authority experiments (1963) – aroused considerable controversy in the public sphere, in particular because of the deceptive practices involved. However, notwithstanding that there may always be some research which threatens to cross the line of acceptable research practice, the increased reticence that many ethics boards and public officers appear to display towards collecting data on people through technological means (such as the use of video recordings) contrasts quite

significantly with developments in our contemporary lives. Perhaps it is time to question the apparent disparity between 'ethics creep' and 'surveillance creep'?

In the Western world, it has become increasingly common for the actions of ordinary people to be captured on video camera via the ubiquity of the closed-circuit television camera (CCTV). Clive Norris et al., back in 2004, noted the extraordinary growth of the use of CCTVs in many countries around the world – suggesting that in the United Kingdom alone, there were likely to be over 4 million cameras in locations such as schools, hospitals, shopping areas, transport systems and more. This number was likely to continue to increase, often justified by the public perception that increased surveillance would improve security* (although Norris et al. pointed out that, at that stage, the limited studies did not suggest a correlation).

As well as the almost unchallenged growth of publicly and privately sponsored CCTVs, a more recent and related phenomenon is the rapid growth of webcams bringing images of people from all walks of life into our homes via our computer connections. Nathan Jacobs et al. (2009) highlighted the freely available data which could be obtained from thousands of outdoor webcams set up by all sorts of public and private organizations and individuals. Finding some of these sites can be as simple as searching the 'webcam layer' on Google Maps. The people featuring in many webcams – not just outdoors but indoors and in a myriad of different types of locations – are often unaware of the presence of cameras, and have not given consent for their images to be beamed to the world. But, again, there has been little public outcry about this phenomenon. In fact, the public has welcomed a lot of these initiatives. For example, people can watch skiers on the ski slopes they are planning to visit that weekend, or cast their eye over the behaviour of crowds at places in foreign countries that they dream of travelling to.

Whether it is being used to assist with the planning of urban spaces – such as the pioneering observational study called the Street Life Project organized by William H. Whyte (1980) or forming clever promotional campaigns such as 'The Fun Theory', Volkswagen's popular campaign aimed at changing people's behaviour (see www.thefuntheory.com) – 'surveillance creep' is everywhere we look. Yet even as we laugh at people we see online reacting to a Fun Theory bottle bank, ethics boards can waver at the discreet use of videos for a research project recording public interactions which are never intended for unrestricted viewing on YouTube. Perhaps it is time we acknowledged that connotations of snooping or deception should be reserved for the few who abuse the privileges associated with unobtrusive data collection, and instead ensure that clever and relevant research is not stymied by oversensitive regulations.

*For an example of the disparity between ethical vigilance and community standards, consider the 2011 controversy in a shopping centre in Braehead, UK, when a father was allegedly harassed by security guards and police for using his mobile phone to take a photograph of his daughter eating an ice-cream. He contravened the centre management policy which had a ban on the taking of photographs with the aim of maintaining a secure environment for its shoppers. But while the controversy raged, the centre's routine use of CCTV cameras, which video people without their consent (including the people in this incident), went almost unchallenged. Ironically (albeit presumably with the father's consent) the photograph of the 4-year-old in the shopping centre was then published by online news services for anyone with an Internet connection to access – but no questions appear to have been asked about security implications!

Ethics symbols used in this book

By now you will have realized that no activity or project is as simple as coming up with a good idea and then charging out into the field to research it. No matter how simple the exercise, consideration should always be given to any likely ethical, legal or other issues. You should always be able to justify your actions when acting as a social science researcher: even when you are a student; even if you are only doing this research to satisfy your course requirements; even if you cannot understand how or why someone could possible object to the activity.

Throughout this book we have suggested a number of activities and projects, which can help consolidate your understanding of the issues discussed in each chapter. Hopefully you will also have fun doing many of the tasks! In order to assist you in your preparations, we have included symbols which can alert you to the sorts of ethical issues which may arise for each particular activity or project. They are not a complete list of all the possible ethical concerns, or even of all the examples already given in this chapter. They are also not symbols reminding you of the fundamental ethical concerns detailed earlier – issues such as consent, privacy and anonymity, and legal concerns are relevant for *all* the exercises and projects listed – and you (or your lecturer) should be able to provide convincing reasons as to why or how these fundamentals have been addressed.

The symbols below are, instead, generalized guidelines reminding you of some of the issues which have been frequently noted in many branches of social science research, but perhaps have not received the attention they deserve. Just because famous academics have achieved interesting results using many of these methods does not mean that you should assume that the actions are not problematic. Consider the activities involved; consider the settings in which they are occurring; consider any cultural expectations or societal events which ought to be factored in. However, do not be intimidated by these ethics warnings. The production of knowledge requires standards, but not unreasonable strictures. With a bit of consideration and planning, you can enjoy your research and not sleep uneasily at night!

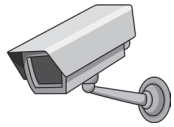
Symbols that are used for activities and projects

Deception or manipulation

These are activities where you are either not disclosing your real identity, or your true purpose for the activity. This may include:

- Assuming a false identity – for instance, creating an avatar in an online game, or pretending to be a tourist while looking at statues.
- Manipulating settings in order to observe reactions, such as deliberately flouting queuing conventions.

Observing and objectifying people by looking covertly from a distance



These activities may concern people who feel that a particular population is being treated in a dispassionate manner akin to scientists observing natural phenomena in a clinical way. The exercises which ask you to observe the waiting behaviours of people in public places (either in person from a discrete distance, or via a webcam) are examples of this.

Intimate or detailed observations of personal places or behaviour

This category refers to more in-depth analysis of intimate, meaningful or personal activities or spaces, and may include making judgements which could upset or offend people. For example:

- Coding or commenting on gravestone trends or personal graffiti.
- Analysing the settings in the background of people's webcams.
- Decoding trends in online family albums.

Possibility of causing discomfort or concern

This is a more generalised category, in which the exercise or project may upset some people, or create anxiety or fear (including, potentially, in the researcher). This may happen due to situations which could include:

- Wasting people's time.
- Not conforming to societal norms, such as in 'breaching' experiments.
- Accidentally or deliberately observing morally ambiguous behaviour (for instance, simulated sexual activity on a website).

3

Visual Research: The Disciplinary Core

This chapter will:

- Identify and discuss the principal ways in which visual research is currently carried out.
- Review the history of photography as a research tool in anthropology and sociology.
- Present some exemplary uses of photographic and image-based research.
- Highlight some of the epistemological concerns which accompany the study of the image.

In his recent proposal for an 'integrated framework' for visual social research, Luc Pauwels, the leading Belgian visual sociologist, argues that the field is founded on 'the idea that valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analysing and theorizing its visual manifestations: behaviour of people and material products of culture' (2010: 546). Pauwels' conception of visual research is one we would readily accept. What is intriguing about his statement is that it contains no reference to visual inquiry being predicated on the technology of the camera or the video recorder and the use of the products of those technologies. Formulations such as this would have been inconceivable 30 years ago or so when visual sociology began to re-emerge as an academic speciality after a lengthy period of quiescence, so widespread was the assumption then that photography, and the generation and analysis of photographic images, were its defining features. Indeed this assumption was still largely in place at the turn of the century when the first edition of our book was published.

Has visual social research evolved beyond the camera and the photographic image as Pauwels' concise summation appears to imply? The short answer to this question is 'no', but we can report that cracks in this image-centred edifice

have begun to appear. A number of recent contributors have admitted that the field is broader than has hitherto been recognized and that equating visual research solely with the study of the image is unduly restrictive. For example, throughout her valuable overview of visual methodologies Rose (2007) uses the phrase 'visual object' interchangeably with the term 'image'. Although Rose does not offer a precise explanation of what a 'visual object' is, the point that she wishes to make seems clear enough: visual researchers need to embrace data which goes beyond the typical photograph or 2D image with which they have been traditionally preoccupied. Rose confesses that her book will deal with a 'narrow selection of things visual' (2007: xv) and suggests that the methods she outlines could equally well apply to 'buildings, built landscape and sculpture' (ibid.). Pauwels, in the article to which we have already referred, ventures into similar territory though even more explicitly. He points out that the phenomenon of material culture, which constitutes one of the core empirical referents of visual inquiry, 'includes artefacts and objects (boardrooms, home settings, art objects) and larger visible structures (e.g. urban areas, cemeteries) that may provide useful information about both the material and the immaterial traits (in as much as they embody values and norms) of a given society' (Pauwels, 2010: 553).

Unfortunately neither Rose nor Pauwels, nor any of the other recent contributors to visual inquiry (e.g. Grady, 2006) who have put forward similar suggestions, appear to have taken up the challenge to systematically develop the field in this way and their work remains largely predicated upon a conventional understanding of 'the visual'. As we have indicated in Chapter 1, expanding the horizons for visual inquiry is precisely the task that we set ourselves in our book. However, before we begin this journey, in this chapter we want to review the current state of visual social science inquiry as we find it today. There can be little doubt that this has now become a burgeoning academic field. In the last decade or so interest in 'the visual' has grown to such an extent that it cannot be viewed, as it once was, as a marginalized speciality with only tenuous connections to mainstream social science. But as a consequence of this growth, the agenda of visual research has diversified to such an extent that we can no longer – if indeed we ever could – speak of *the* method or approach to conducting research in a visual way. Even confining our attention, as we do in this chapter, to visual research as a field concerned with generating and analysing images, we encounter a number of different methods and approaches.

A regular practice among commentators on the field has been to present typologies of visual research practice. Although there is considerable diversity in the approaches identified most now recognize a core distinction, noted in our first edition, between working with photographic images which have been generated by the researcher and, alternatively, relying on visual materials which are already culturally available. The latter could be private or citizen-produced images such as domestic family photographs; alternatively it

could be visual material produced by the media, government organizations or commercial enterprises in the form of promotional or publicity information. Increasingly this material is now disseminated through the Web as we discuss in Chapter 8. Outside of this basic dichotomy, however, there is much less agreement as to how the field might be usefully categorized.

In this chapter we suggest that the vast majority of visual social research conducted today falls into one of four principal modes or approaches. Some of these have existed almost from the inception of visual inquiry as a recognizable field; others are of more recent provenance. In presenting these modes of working we want to identify their principal analytical themes and the key figures with whom they are generally associated. We spend some time in charting the development of these modalities as we feel it is also important for students new to the field, and who are perhaps contemplating conducting their own visual research in one of these areas, to be made aware of the modality's roots, its disciplinary moorings and the trajectory it has followed. The approaches we identify span theoretical, methodological and disciplinary boundaries but we will not dwell on these here as they will be covered in more detail in later chapters.

The four existing approaches to conducting visual inquiry which we identify are as follows:

1 *The use of researcher-produced visual materials*. The generation of photographic images, and to some extent film, has been the traditional mode of conducting visual research. Photography has been principally associated with ethnographically oriented researchers in the fields of social anthropology and sociology, and has been variously understood as an additional means of documenting social and cultural settings and processes. Historically, still photography played a prominent part in the development of visual inquiry and there are some studies which are widely respected as exemplars of the craft. However, it has frequently faced charges that it fails to meet the rigour required by the standards of social science research, and cannot be readily distinguished from the illustrative use of images associated with journalistic or social documentary traditions. Today this form of ethnographic still photographic work is much less popular, and its prospects seem relatively stagnant. It appears to have been largely replaced by work conducted in other modes, particularly participant-centred approaches.
2 *Participant-centred approaches to the use of visual materials*. The defining feature of work in this mode of visual inquiry is that it involves the research subjects actively participating at some point in the research process rather than remaining as passive objects for the researcher's camera. The extent of this involvement is variable, ranging from being invited to comment on visual material in an interview, through to more extensive engagement as image producers, photographing subcultural worlds which are largely inaccessible to the researcher. These different approaches have been given a variety of labels such as 'photo-elicitation', 'auto-photography', 'photovoice' or 'visual storytelling'. Involving research participants in producing their own visual material was first undertaken in pioneering anthropological research, but in recent years participatory visual approaches have become popular in sociology in fields such as adolescence and youth studies, health and illness, and gender relations. More generally they have been identified

as a possible means for achieving a more emancipatory style of qualitative research among scholars investigating marginalized or subordinate groups.

3 *The analysis of existing visual materials.* Visual researchers can, and do, practise their speciality without recourse to recording technology by turning their attention to any of the numerous sources of existing images that are readily available for investigation. The ubiquity and diversity of visual images has often been noted as one of the defining features of our postmodern societies, and the rise of Internet-based visual digital culture has witnessed a dramatic increase in the sheer volume of images that are available for researchers, as well as facilitating their ease of access to these materials. A variety of methods are on offer for the investigation of existing visual data. A great deal of research has traditionally been conducted on media content, such as advertising images, primarily by cultural studies scholars who are interested in uncovering their ideological and cultural messages. More recently attention has shifted to the investigation of Internet-based visual imagery. Much of this work has been carried out on single case studies or small samples from which wider generalizations may often be difficult to make. However, the extensive records which are generally available, for example in the form of newspaper and magazines, print or digital archives, or the voluminous images posted on social media websites, mean that such material can be subject to more rigorous investigation via traditional methods of content analysis. It is worth noting that the distinction between the previous 'participant-centred' visual approaches and the investigation of existing images has been muddied to some extent by the proliferation of Web-based visual material (photographs and videos) which has been posted by 'ordinary people'. To some extent, then, this voluntarily uploaded Web-based material, which can yield valuable insights into the 'world views' or sub-cultural values of the individuals or groups involved, has bypassed the need for researcher-initiated auto-photography designed to collect the same data.

4 *The use of visual materials generated by video technology*. We propose to treat those approaches to visual inquiry which rely on the use of video recording as a fourth, distinctive, mode in which visual research is currently being undertaken. Despite the increasing use of video as a private or domestic media technology, the systematic use of video for research purposes poses particular challenges. As noted above, ethnographic film making did play a part in the early development of disciplines such as social anthropology but for a variety of reasons it fell out of favour. Isolated instances of film being used in other social science disciplines to study aspects of human movement and work activities can be found throughout the twentieth century, but it is only comparatively recently, with the availability of affordable digital recording equipment, that the potential video offers for social researchers has been recognized. However, the use of video technology appears to be marked by a fundamental analytical division. One branch (e.g. Pink, 2007) has sought to disassociate itself from the earlier scientific–realist appropriation of the moving image and instead advocates its use largely as a tool for conducting reflexive or experimental ethnographic research. The focus here is on the creation of new knowledge with the video recording typically viewed as a collaborative undertaking between researcher and researched. In contrast a second group of researchers, those working with the ethnomethodological tradition, see video's potential as lying precisely in its ability to capture the details of social life – the 'elusive phenomena' (Heath et al., 2010: 5), the actions, gestures and competencies which are the basis of everyday interactional conduct and the resulting forms of social organization to which this gives rise. In this tradition the use of video has been equated with the role that the microscope has played in the biological sciences.

In the remainder of the chapter we review these four modalities of visual research. We devote most of our discussion to the first three, and only briefly review the use of video. As noted above, the use of video in visual research is challenging and we do not have space to adequately document the theoretical traditions underpinning this research, or the practical demands and exigencies that work in this modality necessitates. Students interested in either of the approaches to the use of video are advised to consult recent specialized texts (e.g. Knoblauch et al., 2006; Pink, 2007; Heath et al., 2010). We note finally, by way of introduction, that these modalities are not an exhaustive account of the social science work currently being done with visual images. For example, readers familiar with our first edition will see that we have decided not to include a section on representation in the natural sciences and the practices through which scientific data are visualized. Some important work is being undertaken in this area (see e.g. Pauwels, 2006) but overall it appears less central to the field than the four modalities we examine.

The use of researcher-produced visual materials: photography and the social sciences

Visual researchers have frequently noted that sociology and photography share the same (approximate) birth date, 1837. In that year August Comte published his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* and Daguerre's technique for fixing an image on a metal plate was publicly announced at an open meeting of the French Academy of Sciences. But it was not as a social science technique that photography was first recognized or discussed. Rather it was the opposition between its realist and artistic manifestations – a tension whose legacy is arguably still apparent today – which initially captured public imagination. For Daguerre the verisimilitude of the photographic image was his pre-eminent achievement; Daguerre spoke of his invention as having 'given nature the power to reproduce herself'. But for his contemporary, the painter Paul Delaroche, photography meant something else. 'From this day painting is dead', Delaroche is reported to have said on encountering his first photographic image (quoted in Trachtenberg, 1980). Throughout the twentieth century, although the realist conception of photography was dominant, it refused to forgo its aesthetic function, lingering ambivalently at the recognized borders of the art world.[1] This tension is expressed in treatments of the photograph (and video) within the social sciences. As we shall see, for some it is best thought of as a document or tool for faithfully

[1]Pierre Bourdieu et al. (1990) capture this tension in photographic practice in their designation of photography as a 'middle-brow art'.

capturing what 'really' goes on. For others it is a text, an artefact, best thought of as an expression of culture which has to be read or interpreted much like a painting.

Anthropology and sociology were the two social sciences most receptive to photography and although they now share some common elements, historically the role that photography played in these disciplines has been different. As we noted in Chapter 1, anthropology has generally been more comfortable with the camera, and the production of still images and ethnographic films have been widely accepted as legitimate methodological strategies. Michael Ball and Gregory Smith comment on this 'notable asymmetry' between the disciplines in the following terms:

> Anthropology has taken observation and description very much more seriously than sociology which has tended towards the analytical and explanatory. It has been easier to justify the anthropological use of the camera because the discipline's traditional topic matter is 'exotic' and because it is a discipline which is committed to exploring cultural difference. Sociology for much of its history has not only lacked these legitimations, it has been faced with the presence of non-sociological documentarists in the societies it studies. (2007: 305)

In the case of sociology, after an early initial flirtation with the camera, which we look at shortly, photography fell out of favour – indeed into disrepute. However the re-establishment of image-based visual sociology in the 1970s and through to the present day has been characterized more by earnest attempts to establish its methodological adequacy than by a flowering of rich empirical visual studies of urban or Western settings. Much of this discussion has been concerned with differentiating the work of the 'visual sociologist' from the photo-documentary journalist tradition to which Ball and Smith refer. Visual sociological ethnographies are few and far between. Certainly there is nothing in sociology that can rival anthropological classics such as Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's (1942) visual documentation of Balinese culture.

Proto-sociological uses of photography first appeared in the late nineteenth century in the social documentary work of Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. Riis, a reporter, used photography as a means of drawing attention to the slum conditions in New York in the 1890s while Hine, who had some training as a sociologist, is famous for his images of newly arrived immigrant labourers and the conditions of child labour in mines and factories. Their work is seen, in part, as contributing to the passage of new labour legislation. At the turn of the century, then, sociology and photography were historically linked as practices which shared a common interest in exploring and documenting society. Nevertheless it was not an enduring marriage as contemporary visual researchers continue to remind us.

Still photographs were a conspicuous feature of American sociology in the early decades of the twentieth century. Between 1896 and 1916 the *American Journal of Sociology* published 31 articles which contained 244 photographic

illustrations. The majority of these were, as Leonard Henny argues, used simply as support for the articles dealing with social reform, and he suggests that today we look at them 'with some nostalgia and some scepticism' (1986: 1). The latter sentiment would appear to reflect the 'official' institutional position of the journal for, as C. Stasz (1979) notes, an article dealing with the first 50 years of the journal (Shanas, 1945) made no reference whatsoever to them. In her analysis of the photographs, Stasz found that publication had not been evenly distributed over this period. The majority of illustrated articles (20) had appeared between 1896 and 1904; there were none between 1905 and 1909 and then a further 11 between 1910 and 1916. She suggests that the editorial policy that eventually led to the abandonment of illustrations after 1916 may have occurred as early as 1905. Stasz's argument is that the disappearance of photographs from the *AJS* after 1916 (and by implication the whole of mainstream American sociology) was a direct outcome of journal editor Albion Small's concern to establish American sociology on a more scientific basis. For Small it was the association of the discipline with reform and social amelioration, the subjects which the illustrated articles addressed, which had to be countered in successfully moving sociology 'out of amateurishness, not to say quackery, and advance toward responsible scientific procedure' (Small 1907: 637, quoted in Stasz, 1979: 132).

To all intents and purposes this marked the end for visual sociology for nearly 50 years. Photographic images disappeared from the pages of sociology journals and textbooks as the discipline became increasingly concerned with establishing its scientific credentials, a process whereby the quantification of research practice was viewed as the model to be emulated. Even in those branches of sociology where fieldwork was to remain a viable, and valued, component – such as the Chicago School during the period from the 1920s to the 1950s – the use of visuals was largely shunned. The rich ethnographies that were produced are almost entirely devoid of images, and those that do appear, such as the dozen or so photographs included in Nels Anderson's study *The Hobo* (1923), have only minimal illustrative value. Sociology had become a discipline of words.

The re-emergence of visual sociology

This situation was to remain until the 1970s when an interest in photography tentatively re-emerged and the first professional associations and journals for visual sociological research were established. We do not have the space to chart the details of this revival and we restrict ourselves to noting some of the key figures and scholarly works.[2] To some extent the rebirth of visual sociology was assisted by, and took inspiration from, anthropology where a tradition of visual inquiry had, to some extent, survived throughout this period. It is worth

[2]Useful overviews of its rebirth have been provided by Douglas Harper (see e.g. Harper, 1988; 1998).

noting that two of the most important works in visual sociology which appeared in the 1970s were both first published in the journal *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*: Howard Becker's article 'Photography and sociology'[3] (Becker, 1974); and Erving Goffman's 'Gender advertisements' (Goffman, 1976; see also Goffman, 1979). Becker offers a thoughtful methodological overview of the part that photography might contribute to sociological research. In contrast, Goffman's article is an exemplary empirical investigation of existing photographs (advertising images) and we consider this in a later section of the chapter.

Becker begins his discussion by observing that sociology and photography share a common ground in the study of organizations, institutions and communities. However, sociologists who want to use photography in their research must seek to overcome the deficiencies of the documentary photographers. That is, they should take advantage of their knowledge of social organization and become more sophisticated in the appropriation of their photographic evidence. In Becker's view the primary fault with documentary photographers is that their work is theoretically undeveloped:

> Close study of the work of social documentary photography provokes a double reaction. At first, you find that they call attention to a wealth of detail from which an interested sociologist could develop useful ideas about whose meaning he could spin interesting speculation … Greater familiarity leads to a scaling down of admiration. While the photographs do have these virtues, they also tend to restrict themselves to a few reiterated simple statements. Rhetorically important as a strategy of proof, the repetition leads to work that is intellectually and analytically thin. (Becker, 1974: 11)

For Becker the most important way in which the photographic explorations of social life can be made more sophisticated (sociological) is for the researcher to avoid the accumulation of isolated images and seek instead to photograph 'sequences of action' which try to capture something of the dynamic aspects of social organization or the patterns of cause and effect. This means that the sociologist–photographer must learn to record images in a manner analogous to the process of data collection in fieldwork. The essence of fieldwork for Becker is that it involves a continual 'grounded theory' style of testing tentative hypotheses in the context of a series of repeated observations. The researcher enters the field without any rigid or preconceived conceptual ideas. Initial hunches are confirmed, refined or rejected as further observations are made. Data collection and data analysis are not separate phases of the research process: 'analysis is continuous and contemporaneous with data-gathering' (p. 13).

[3]A measure of its perceived importance can be gauged from the fact that it was subsequently republished a year later in the arts and photography journal *Afterimage*. Becker also includes it in his 1986 collection *Doing Things Together*.

Photographers must carry out the same process. This means that they must be prepared to spend much longer in the recording of their images than they normally would expect. Initially they may try to photograph as much as possible of the group or community they are studying but on subsequent visits their choice of images must be more theoretically informed. They can also anticipate having a closer relationship with the people whose activities they are recording and may well seek their advice and reactions as the research develops. Photographic fieldwork and sociological fieldwork become almost identical for Becker:

> As the work progresses the photographer will be alert for the visual embodiments of his ideas, for images that contain and communicate the understandings he is developing … His theories will help him to photograph what he might have otherwise ignored. Simultaneously he will let what he finds in his photographs direct his theory-building, the pictures and ideas becoming closer and closer approximations of one another. (1974: 14)

Becker's overall aim is thus to establish the similarities between photography and sociology. Both 'vocations' are faced with issues such as the reliability of the evidence they collect, and the extent to which generalizations can be made on the basis of a limited amount of data. For example, elsewhere in his preface to the edited collection, *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences* (Wagner, 1979), Becker demonstrates that he is clearly cognisant of the charges of methodological distortion which he feels mainstream sociology is only too ready to level against the use of photography. He speaks of the 'manifold difficulties' faced by anyone who attempts to use photographs in their research as 'the very difficulties which lead other social scientists to be sceptical of the results'. Becker adds:

> but, in every case, it is easy to see that the difficulty is not unique to photographic work. On the contrary, visual materials simply make obvious the difficulties we have with every variety of data. Do we worry because the photographic frame, putting a line around much that is of interest to us, excludes everything else? We should, just as we should worry that a questionnaire finds out something about what it asks about, and tells us nothing about the rest. Do we worry about the way the relation between the photographer and the people being photographed affects the material we get? We should, just as we should try to understand the effect of the relationship between the investigator and the people investigated in participant observation or experiments. (1979: 7–8)

Becker has championed the case for visual sociology over the subsequent decades although he himself has largely refrained from conducting empirical visual sociological work, preferring to deal with methodological arguments in support of its wider adoption. In an article published in 2002 in *Visual Studies*, he returns to the theme of photographic truth and the adequacy of photographic practice. As a way forward from the philosophical muddle in which debate about truth claims of photographic images are inevitably shrouded, he suggests that we think instead about the kinds of evidence which photographs might provide for social science arguments.

He does this by revisiting the collaborative book by art critic John Berger and documentary photographer Jean Mohr, *A Seventh Man*, originally published in 1975, which examines the condition of migrant labour in Europe. In Becker's view the photographs in the book 'seem unquestionably to contribute' to the core textual arguments about the functional significance of migrant labour for the host European countries. So the question that he asks is how do the photographs provide solid evidence for this? Becker's answer, in short, is that the photographs embody what he terms 'specific generalizations'. By this oxymoron he wants to highlight the particular contribution which the intelligent use of visual material – as evident in *A Seventh Man* – can make in social inquiry. His argument is that the wider economic, political and social conditions – capitalist development, the exploitation of labour, and so on, which serve as the context for Berger and Mohr's book – are abstract entities which cannot be photographed per se. But what can be photographed are the people and things which exemplify or embody these entities. For Becker the photographs of the migrant labourers bidding farewell to their families, receiving their medical examinations and arriving at European railway stations:

> are specific instances of the general argument. They do not 'prove' the argument … but rather assure us that the entities of the abstract argument, the generalized story, really exist as living people who come from and work in real places. This is not evidence as 'compelling' proof, but rather as what is sometimes called an 'existence' proof, showing that the thing we are talking about is possible. (2002: 5)

In Becker's view the visual material which is offered in the book is at variance with both standard photojournalistic and artistic approaches to the subject matter. Conventional photojournalism generally works by 'personalizing' abstract issues. It does this by focusing on or naming specific people who have a particular story to tell. In contrast, more upmarket photographic journalistic practice moves away from personalization by attempting to present an image which signifies or embodies a universal human theme such as tragedy or suffering. Berger and Mohr's work, Becker claims, departs from both of these and is remarkable 'for its impersonality, for its lack of sentimentality' (2002: 10). But, tellingly, Becker also observes that the 'deepening of understanding' of an issue like migrant labour which Mohr's photographs afford are also crucially dependent on the sense-making abilities of the viewer. This is the necessary corollary to his argument about how they provide evidence. As specific generalizations:

> the images invite us to generalize in the ways the text argues. They show us real instances of what the text talks about, with enough detail about the specific people and places we are looking at to let us make more and other interpretations. In that way the instances are both specific and general, abstract and concrete. (Becker, 2002: 10)

Becker's observation that it is the ability of the reader or viewer to find or attribute some wider, theoretical significance, which largely determines the success – or failure – of a visual sociological publication, is one we would endorse. In one sense he is simply pointing out that without this interpretive work, images would have minimal explanatory power. Far too often, in our opinion, works in visual sociology have taken the reader's inferential abilities for granted, believing that the images 'speak for themselves'. A similar argument was put forward by Emanuel Schegloff (1988) in relation to Goffman's observations on the minutiae of social interaction. Schegloff challenges the widely held view that Goffman's work is densely empirical. In his view this was misplaced and Goffman was guilty of 'sociology by epitome'. Goffman's observations of social life, Schegloff argued:

> achieve their sense of typicality, by using but a stroke or two … a detail or two, to indicate the scene which we as readers are to call up from memory, personal experience or imagination. If he succeeds, that is if *we* succeed in calling such a scene to mind, our ability to do so from his detail or two is proof of its typicality. The typicality of the scene or action has not only been 'shown' but has been enlisted and exploited, and the adequacy of his description … has *ipso facto* been demonstrated. (1988: 101)

Much of conventional image-based sociological visual inquiry operates, we argue, according to the same method of epitome. The photographs which provide the illustrative material for the field's ethnographic essays, research reports and monographs serve a purpose only to the extent that *we* can supply the theoretical or conceptual point *they* purport to deliver. Photographic visual sociology thus succeeds only because of the tacit visual literacy on the part of the reader.

Anthropology and photography

The use of visual techniques in anthropology has arguably enjoyed a much longer – and largely continuous – history than is the case with sociology and consequently its story is more complex. Again we propose to review only the principal themes and we refer readers elsewhere to more detailed overviews of the emergence and trajectory taken by visual methods in anthropology.[4] To an extent their popularity and legitimacy has waxed and waned over the last 100 years, largely reflecting the changing theoretical paradigms within the discipline. If sociology's association with images in the articles in the *AJS* was tainted by a (well-meaning) concern with social reform, initial uses of photography in anthropology arguably had more dubious roles to perform. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when evolutionary approaches were in the ascendancy, still photography was enlisted as a means of documenting supposed differences between racial groups.

[4]See for example John Collier (1967), Elizabeth Edwards (1994; 2001), Marcus Banks (1998) and Sarah Pink (2006).

Pioneers in this use of photography, a method known as anthropometry, such as Thomas Huxley (Darwin's champion in the debate which followed the publication of *The Origin of Species*) and John Lamprey devised instruments and strategies whereby the supposed morphological differences could be precisely recorded. The photographic subjects – selected as representatives of the various racial 'types' in the British Empire – were obliged to be photographed naked in both full frontal and profile. As contemporary anthropologists (e.g. Edwards, 2001) have been at pains to point out, the production of these photographs cannot be understood outside of the assumption of racial and cultural superiority and the desire for controlling knowledge so central to the colonial gaze.

With the rise of more systematic fieldwork methods in the 1920s and 1930s, as exemplified by Malinowski's work in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1922), Radcliffe-Brown and later Evans-Pritchard, anthropological theory turned from evolutionary models to embrace synchronic theories of social structure and social institutions and the functional relations between these. Consequently it was assumed that there was less need for photography since in the move away from the documentation of the 'surface' elements of society to a focus with the underlying rules or principles of social organization, the phenomena of interest to the anthropologist were now less visible. But photography did not disappear: the functionalist anthropologists were also assiduous photographers, and their books are not regarded as works of visual anthropology but rather as richly illustrated ethnographies. Ball and Smith suggest that realist themes were still of paramount importance to Malinowski and, echoing Becker's comment about 'specific generalizations', add that his photographs 'helped to emphasize that his ethnography addressed the brute "facts" of Trobriand life with a minimum of subjective construction and artifice' (Ball and Smith, 2007: 307).

It is, however, within anthropology that one work stands out as an unrivalled exemplar of the use of visual techniques and we now turn to consider this in the first of two empirical case studies featured in this chapter.

CASE STUDY 1

Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*

Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead's photographic exploration of Balinese culture, which was carried out between 1936 and 1939, has achieved iconic status among visual researchers. Becker (1981: 13) eulogizes over the images, remarking on the 'visual vitality and complexity we associate with the work of fine art photographers'. Ball and Smith (1992) remark more accurately that the significance of Bateson and Mead's study lay in the ways in which the authors had moved beyond the standard ethnographic uses of photographic materials where these remain largely under-analysed devices:

(Continued)

(Continued)

> Photographs usually only serve illustrative functions for anthropological work or at best stand as constituents of slide-show travelogues. What makes Bateson and Mead's work exemplary and ground breaking is its use of photographs as topics of investigation. (Ball and Smith, 1992: 14)

In their introduction, Bateson and Mead refer to the form of presentation of their research materials as 'an experimental innovation' (1942: xi) in which they tried to communicate the intangible aspects of culture which previous, purely verbal renditions had failed to capture. Photographs, they argued, were ideally suited to identify 'similar emotional threads' which run through otherwise disparate forms of behaviour:

> By the use of photographs, the wholeness of each piece of behaviour can be preserved, while the special cross-referencing desired can be obtained by placing the series of photographs on the same page. It is possible to avoid the artificial construction of a scene at which a man, watching a dance, also looks up at an aeroplane and has a dream; it is also possible to avoid diagramming the single elements in those scenes which we wish to stress – the importance of levels in Balinese inter-personal relationships – in such a way that the reality of the scenes themselves is destroyed. (Bateson and Mead, 1942: xii)

Balinese Character, then, is not a book about the customs of the Balinese but rather an attempt to show how the Balinese 'as living persons, moving, standing, eating, sleeping, dancing, and going into trance embody that abstraction which … we technically call culture' (ibid.). To achieve this goal the book is organized into two complementary parts. First, an introductory essay written by Mead, structured as an ethnographic commentary on the topics covered in the photographic material. The second part of the book presents the photographs which Bateson had taken, arranged into 100 plates, each containing between four and 11 photographs, although the majority feature between six and eight images. In all there are 759 photographs which he reports had been whittled down from about 25,000 originally taken. The 100 plates are organized into major groups which reflected the authors' primary interest in socialization and its constitutive part in shaping Balinese cultural ethos: 'spatial orientation and levels', 'learning', 'integration and disintegration of the body', 'orifices of the body', 'autocosmic play', 'parents and children', 'siblings', 'stages of child development' and '*rites de passage*'.

Each full-page plate is accompanied on its opposing page by an explanation of the context for the photographs and then captions, many detailed, for each of the individual images. It is clear that both images and written texts are equally essential, but – and this is where the uniqueness of the monograph lies – there is nevertheless a degree of autonomy to the pictures. While the texts would be meaningless without the corresponding images, the reverse is not the case. The contextual details and captions, of course, assist in the overall interpretation we reach of the images but the photographs alone frequently let us *observe* the manner in which the particular cultural item they are focusing on at that juncture is enacted out.

One of the primary ways in which this is achieved is through the close proximity of images which were recorded in relatively short duration. For example, Plate 47 'Stimulation and Frustration', which we reproduce as Figure 3.1, contains nine images of a mother and child which were recorded in a period of only two minutes of interaction. Examining the images on the page we can almost observe the real-time gestural initiation and response which characterizes this sequence of behaviour. It is this level of behavioural detail which stamps the use of photographic imagery with its

uniqueness. No other ethnographers have attempted to use visual data in this way. A case could be made for suggesting that Bateson was actually engaged in a form of interactional analysis *avant la lettre*. There is a delightful historical irony in the realization that in the year that Harvey Sacks – the founder of conversation analysis – was born, Bateson was already busy in the field engaged in his own brand of visual documentation of turn-taking.

Figure 3.1 *'Stimulus and Frustration'*, Plate 47 from Bateson and Mead, *Balinese Character* (1942), New York: New York Academy of Sciences

Bateson and Mead's book had very little to say about the more general principles which research in visual anthropology should observe, and the discipline had to wait for over two decades before the first systematic discussions of film and photography as research techniques were published: Collier's overview of the use of still photography (Collier, 1967) and Hockings' edited collection dealing with ethnographic film (Hockings, 1975). Both of these works were to frame visual anthropology as a field broadly concerned with the scientific or evidentiary potential of images, a stance which was to remain largely unchallenged until the 1990s when the 'reflexive turn' in anthropological theory gave rise to a more critical engagement with images and image making (e.g. Banks and Morphy, 1997). Hockings' collection was introduced by Margaret Mead with a chapter in which she famously castigated the anthropological community for its 'gross and dreadful negligence' with regard to visual recording technology, and for continuing to rely on the 'hopelessly inadequate note-taking of an earlier age' (Mead, 1975). The other chapters variously reviewed the history of ethnographic filming, offered specialized discussion of the use of film and video and suggestions for how visual information obtained by anthropologists could be presented or disseminated.

Collier's text (1967; see also Collier and Collier, 1986) has some parallels with Becker's (1974) agenda for visual sociology and its need to build upon and rectify the flaws in the social documentary tradition. Collier had previously conducted documentary photographic fieldwork in the 1940s as part of the (US) Farm Security Administration project lead by Roy Stryker. His movement to anthropology came later, but in important respects his understanding of photography's contribution to research was profoundly shaped by his earlier practical experiences rather than any sense of anthropology as a theoretical discipline engaged in cultural interpretation. For Collier, humans are not good observers: as in many other branches of science, humankind has come to rely on instruments to make observations and the camera is the instrument that 'can extend our visual processes and to help us *find out more* about the nature of man and his multi-faceted cultures' (Collier 1967: 6, emphasis in original).

In some respects Collier is even more optimistic than Becker about the contribution that photography can offer for social science research. Whereas Becker expressed some reservations about the inferences which can be drawn from the photographic record, for Collier 'photographs are precise records of material reality' (p. 5). He stresses throughout the book that the camera has many advantages over human observation: for example, the camera allows us to see 'without fatigue'. Collier suggests a range of ways in which photographic evidence can be incorporated into a research project, ranging from the aerial mapping of a community to determine ecological and land use patterns, to a more detailed on-ground recording of its housing and economic infrastructure. Copious practical advice about each of these issues is

provided. He devotes a chapter to photographing social interaction understood in a gross sense, as the recording of 'natives acting out their roles' in public spaces, and suggests that city streets 'can be a practical laboratory for photographic analysis' and a means of investigating 'the complex dimensions of social structure, cultural identity and psychological expression' (p. 33). The book also includes a discussion of combining interviewing with photography – a technique Collier had pioneered a decade earlier (Collier, 1957). We consider this in our next section.

Collier's work has been dismissed in some quarters of contemporary anthropology as being simplistic or naive. For example, Edwards has suggested that the book is simply a manual 'of method and analysis working within a largely unmediated realist frame' (1997: 53) and Pink argues that it is of marginal historical value as 'visual anthropologists have long since departed from pure observation to emphasize the intersubjectivity and collaborative aspects of the production of photography' (2006: 36). We accept that reflexivity has become a major – if not *the* central – concern for many contributors to visual anthropology today, but this should not detract from the valuable contribution that pioneers such as Collier made towards the establishment of visual approaches. In the following section we turn to the second of the modalities of current visual research practice where reflexivity and collaboration have become dominant motifs.

Participant-centred approaches to the use of visual materials

Over the last two decades one of the most significant developments in visual inquiry has been a shift in focus from the generation of images by the researcher *as ends in themselves*, to approaches which involve the participation of the research subjects at some point in the investigation. The extent of this involvement is variable, ranging from being invited to comment on photographs taken by the researcher, to becoming image makers in their own right. In the latter case, although the visual images which have been generated can be the object of analysis, they are more frequently used as means for encouraging the research participants to verbally reflect on their lives, experiences and identities. These participant-centred approaches are variously described as 'auto-photography', 'self-directed photography', 'photo-elicitation',[5] 'photovoice', or 'visual storytelling', although the range of

[5]A useful overview of such participatory approaches, largely in the form of photo-elicitation as it existed a decade ago, is provided by Harper (2002). A measure of the growth of this style of visual research practice can be seen in the fact that Harper was able to review all of the then published photo-elicitation studies. Such a feat would be impossible today in the confines of one article.

techniques that are employed in particular studies is such that one umbrella descriptive term is unlikely to be agreed upon by all researchers in this field. Regardless of the label that is assigned, these approaches mark an evolution in visual inquiry from the older documentary style in which the 'authority' for the interpretation of the image resided with the researcher, to a more collaborative stance in which a key goal appears to be the use of visual material as a tool to 'decrease the power differential between the researcher and the researched' (Packard, 2008: 63).

The origins of participant-centred approaches

The idea of providing research subjects with recording technology was first employed by anthropologists. One of the earliest studies, Sol Worth and John Adair's *Through Navajo Eyes* (1972), is seen as particularly significant because of its ambitious theoretical aims – in essence an exploration of the thesis of linguistic relativity first proposed in the 1930s by Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. The Sapir–Whorf thesis proposed that our perception of reality was significantly determined by the language we spoke, so that members of different cultures might have radically different understandings of core categories such as time or space. The thesis is often illustrated by Whorf's observation that in the language of the Hopi Indians time is understood as a continuous process rather than something which is divisible into discrete measurable units as is the case with 'Standard Average European' languages. Although there had been prior attempts to test the thesis, these had all been through the medium of language and so a degree of circularity had inevitably emerged. Worth and Adair's insight was to try to explore the thesis using a different communication channel – film. In their introduction, Worth and Adair state that their research set out to address the following question:

> What would happen if someone with a culture that makes and uses motion pictures taught people who had never made or used motion pictures to do so for the first time? (1972: 3)

In an attempt to answer this question, Worth and Adair taught seven Navajo Indians living in a traditional community in Arizona how to use 16 mm Bell and Howell cameras and then, after some brief practice with the camera, they asked them to make short (approximately 20 minutes) films. There were no instructions given about what to film or how the content should be presented.

Worth and Adair report a delightful vignette which occurred prior to the commencement of their research. They had visited one of the Navajo elders to discuss the research and he had listened patiently to them as they outlined their research plans. When they had finished, the elder thought for a while and then responded with a question: 'Will making movies do the sheep any harm?' Worth reassured him that no harm would come to the sheep. After some

further thought the elder asked a second question: 'Will making movies do the sheep good?', to which Worth admitted that as far as he knew making movies would not do the sheep any good. 'Then why make movies?' came the response from the elder.

Worth and Adair comment that they had no answer to this final question, adding that it is not directly answered in their book either. Fortunately this did not prevent the research going ahead and the films were duly completed. The silent films covered a variety of topics ranging from craftwork such as weaving a rug or the work of a silversmith, to more 'abstract' films featuring aspects of the landscape. All but one of the films was given a title by the Navajo film maker concerned. Worth and Adair's analysis and interpretation of the films is complex and occupies almost half of the book. The films contained a number of features by which they departed from traditional canons of film making. For example, almost all of them showed an 'inordinate amount of walking'; on the other hand there were almost no close-up shots of faces, a feature which is perhaps understandable given eye-to-eye contact is generally frowned upon in Navajo culture. What of the Sapir–Whorf thesis? What evidence was there that the Navajo 'saw' reality in a different way because of their linguistic resources? In his appraisal of the Worth and Adair research, Banks suggests the results 'broadly confirm a "weak" version of the hypothesis' (2007: 3), that language was a guide to social reality but not wholly determinative of it. For example, Worth and Adair argue that the emphasis on walking in the films arose from the special significance that the Navajo attach to 'walking as an *act*' (1972: 146, emphasis in original). Walking was not just a means of getting somewhere but a culturally significant event in itself and Navajo stories frequently contain words such as 'approaching', 'went' or 'came'. Similar considerations about the way that Navajo notions of 'action' are linguistically shaped were also evident in other aspects of the films such as the camera dwelling for a long time on apparently trivial behaviours such as winding up a ball of wool. However, to judge the research solely by the yardstick of the evidence it provides for the linguistic reality thesis would be a mistake. Worth and Adair's study was truly pioneering and it has not been equalled or surpassed in scope or ambition in any subsequent participatory visual research.

Anthropology also has the honour of being the discipline in which the technique of photo-elicitation was first practised. Collier's article, published in *American Anthropologist* in 1957, reported the results of 'two experiments' in which he employed photographs in novel ways to overcome practical problems encountered in a research project broadly concerned with the relationship of environmental factors on mental health, which was being carried out in the Maritime Provinces in Canada. The first, and less significant, experiment did not involve interviewing but simply utilized photographs taken by Collier of the range of different housing stock in the community, as a means of more accurately calibrating

decisions about the socio-economic standing of its occupants which had previously been difficult to ascertain by the researchers. By providing the team with the same visual evidence, they were able to agree upon the criteria to be used and thus coordinate their disparate and idiosyncratic rating judgements which had been arrived at by field observations alone. However, the second use of photographs was more radical and heralded the arrival of the photo-interview.

A core part of the overall project was to determine how community members from the French–Arcadian section of the province were coping with their migration to Anglophone industrial towns. The researchers had found it difficult to explore the effects of the transition between these different ethnic and social worlds using conventional survey or interview methods, and so they hit on the idea of incorporating photographs of the two sections of the community into the interviews. Moreover, the intervention was truly experimental. Some of the interviews were carried out with the assistance of photographs and others (the control interviews) were conducted without photographic aids. The outcome of the experiment appeared to offer conclusive evidence for the value of including the photographs. In his conclusion Collier states that:

> The material obtained with photographs was precise and at times even encyclopaedic; the control interviews were less structured, rambling, and freer in association. Statements in the photo-interviews were in direct response to graphic probes and differed in character as the content of the pictures differed, whereas the character of the controlled interviews seemed rather to be governed by the mood of the informants. (1957: 856)

Photo-elicitation is clearly seen by Collier as a method which can enhance the quality of the data which is being collected in a project. Elsewhere in his article he suggests that photographs can be means to 'overcome the fatigue' typically associated with verbal interviews or the phenomenon of 'diminishing return' which frequently inflicts repeat interviews. Later exponents of the technique (e.g. Schwartz, 1989) have endorsed these comments, suggesting that photo-elicitation can help transform the artificiality of the interview into something more closely resembling a naturally occurring event – such as the viewing of a photo album.

Developments and themes in contemporary participatory approaches

After Collier's original article, references to photo-elicitation couched in the language of experimental intervention virtually disappeared as the technique became associated with more exploratory qualitative work. We look at the developments which have taken place here shortly. It is worth noting,

however, that work involving experimental designs has been employed in a related branch of visual participatory research – auto-photography – in disciplines which are more quantitative or where the testing of explicit hypotheses is encouraged. In essence, auto-photography involves providing the research subject with a camera and then analysing the resulting images, a process which may also require an interview. Within social psychology, auto-photography has been employed for a number of years in quantitative studies of the self. Unlike the more qualitative approaches where the participants' thoughts concerning the meanings of the photographs are a key source of research data, in social psychological uses of auto-photography the analytical task of interpreting the images remains squarely in the court of the researcher. Psychologists who have pioneered the use of auto-photography such as Robert Ziller (e.g. Ziller, 1990) see the use of self-generated photographs as a natural extension to the traditional verbal inquiries into the self concept. Indeed, there are aspects of the self which can arguably be more reliably gauged with such photographs. For example, Ziller and Rorer (1985) have investigated shyness using this technique. They found that first-year university students were less likely to include pictures of people when asked to portray their environment photographically than those in later years who were presumably more settled into their college life. Overall 'shy' people were less likely to include other people in their photographic depictions of self.

Stephanie Clancy and Stephen Dollinger (1993) have used the auto-photography technique in an investigation of sex role differences. An initial hypothesis concerning gender differences in social connectedness was born out in their research. For example, they found that men were significantly more likely than women to provide photographs featuring themselves alone. Women, alternatively, provided photographs which revealed them to be more interpersonally connected: their photographs contained more depictions of people touching, smiling, groups of people and family-oriented pictures. By contrast men's photographs more frequently included activities such as sport and other leisure activities, as well as pictures of prize possessions – cars and motorcycles.

The technique can also be used to investigate cross-cultural differences in perception. Ziller (1990: 107–121) reports a study in which students from four different countries (USA, Japan, Taiwan and Venezuela), but who were all resident in the USA, were asked to take photographs which depicted what the USA meant to them. When comparing the American students' photographs with those of the other national groups, six categories of photographs, out of a much larger corpus, were found to be significantly different. American students were more likely to take pictures which depicted 'freedom' or 'patriotism' (e.g. photographs of flags, political posters, churches) whereas the foreign students were more likely to photograph images of 'sport' and 'food' (e.g. images of McDonald's restaurants, Coca-Cola dispensing machines).

3.1 PROJECT

Auto-Photography and Generational Change

Estimated time required: Allow up to a week for your participants to take photographs to give to you. The actual analysis will take upwards of 1–2 hours, depending on the number of categories you develop and the depth of analysis and explanation.

Ziller's cross-national research could be easily modified by employing age as the key independent variable. An auto-photographic project with this design would be an excellent way to explore a topic such as generational difference in conceptions of national identity. For this assignment you would require representatives of three generational cohorts, for example young adults (18–24), the generation in early middle age (45–50) and finally an older cohort aged, say, between 70 and 80. Members of each of the cohorts would be required to take a series of photographs (10 would be sufficient) which they feel best express their country's national identity – the images which they feel best capture what their country means to them.

To ensure some comparability in the images obtained you should attempt to control for region or location and ask your participants in the project to restrict their photographing to their residential location. This will avoid the problems of having to compare images generated by inner city residents (the Sydney Opera House, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, to use Australian examples) with those which people who are resident in the rural or more distant areas could obtain. As with Ziller's research, you should be able to develop a number of coding categories for these images which should give you some insight into the ways in which conceptions of national identity vary according to cohort.

An additional dimension to the project could be to ask the members of the two older cohorts if they have photographs in their possession which capture images of national identity which have now disappeared, and see whether they feel these older images are more authentic expressions of their country.

The most popular use of participatory visual methods, such as auto-photography, is, however, to be found among qualitative researchers. For example, in recent years photo-elicitation or auto-photography has been carried out in qualitative studies of homeless people (Johnsen et al., 2008), socially excluded black youth (Wright et al., 2010), chronic disease self-management in adolescents (Drew et al., 2010), pain management in older adults (Baker and Wang, 2006), female Aboriginal health care workers (Wilkin and Liamputtong, 2010), prostate cancer survivors (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007) and identity construction in mature age body-builders (Phoenix, 2010). These studies, and many others like them, follow a fairly similar format. Rose (2007: 241–242) suggests that there is a basic template to much of this research which involves six steps or ingredients and, although not all of these steps are included in every participatory visual

study, for ease of exposition we present her outline of the six steps with illustrations from some of the studies referred to above.[6]

> *Step 1* is an initial interview conducted with the research participants. The purpose of the interview is to explain the aims of the research and why the respondents have been recruited or chosen. Typically at this stage there is no, or only minimal, discussion of the role photography will play in the research; instead the focus is on the broader questions to which the eventual photographs will play a part in answering.
>
> *Step 2* involves providing the research participants with a camera as well as some instruction in its use if this is required. Although digital cameras are now relatively cheap, most researchers prefer to use some form of single-use or disposable camera. The assumption here seems to be to minimize the degree of researcher control of the images which digital technology would permit and to maximize the 'spontaneity' or unedited character of the visual material which is generated. This is also reflected in the minimal instructions about the subject matter of the photographs which are generally given to the participants. For example, in their auto-photographic study of socially excluded black youth in the UK, Wright et al. (2010) gave disposable cameras to their research participants and asked them to take pictures of 'family, friends and anyone else who has been a source of support and people they enjoyed being with'. The youths were not otherwise told what to photograph, thereby leaving decisions about the content and process to them. In other cases where the research question is more specific the researcher may exercise more control over this stage. For example, in their study of how young people coped with chronic health conditions Drew et al. (2010) asked their participants to create a series of photographs to show (a) what it was like to live with an ongoing health condition and (b) the sorts of things they might do to take care of their health.
>
> *Step 3* is for the photographs to be developed and, in some cases, for the research subjects to write brief comments about them prior to meeting with the researcher for a second time. This can frequently be more complicated than this summary implies. Several researchers have commented that this can be a very time-consuming process, particularly if the research involves marginalized groups. For example, in their study of homeless people, many with drug or alcohol problems, in two sites in the UK, Johnsen et al. (2008), commented that the need of some of their participants to find somewhere safe to eat and/or feed a 'habit' inevitably outweighed their desire to complete the research exercises. A number of their participants failed to return their cameras, some reported that they were lost or stolen (and they add that it is not unrealistic to assume that some may have been sold). In some cases the participants disappeared completely. However, assuming that the cameras are successfully returned and the film developed, a crucial phase in participatory visual design then needs to be confronted concerning the issue of respondent anonymity and/or ownership of the images. In the youth chronic health management research project Drew et al. (2010) took particular care to ensure that the research participants were able to make decisions about whether the photographs they had

[6]Rose (2004) has conducted her own photo-elicitation research exploring the contradictory meanings and uses that family snapshots have for a sample of young mothers.

taken could be incorporated into the project data. A written information sheet stressed that the adolescents would be the first to view the developed images and that they would have an opportunity at the start of the interview to remove any images they did not want the researcher to see. In contrast Johnsen et al. (2008) approached the issue of image inclusion in a different way. Their research participants were provided with a disposable camera and asked to carry this with them for a week and to take pictures of the places that they utilized in everyday life and/or that were in some way important to them. However, upon return of the cameras two sets of photographs were developed – one for the research participants to keep and one for the research team's records. This contrasts with the approach taken by Drew et al. (2010) where the research participants were given the opportunity not to have some of their images included in the project. However, Johnsen et al. also chose to de-identify any people who appeared in the photographs which they include in their article.

Step 4 involves the researcher carrying out a second interview with the participants during which the photographs they have taken are discussed in detail. All researchers comment on the importance of this step and how the presence of the visual material serves to facilitate the interview process and elicit verbal material which may not otherwise have surfaced. In their study of prostate cancer survivors Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) comment on the general reluctance of men to admit to, let alone talk about, illness and discuss a number of ways in which the photographs helped to overcome this. For example, a number of their respondents dwelt on the objects or possessions depicted in the photographs and this helped generate a sense of shared 'men's-talk' within the overall formality of the interview. At other times when the topic of the interview turned to more sensitive matters, such as the specific details of their recovery or their feelings of mortality, the men 'found respite and refuge in the photographs' and, by speaking in the third person about others they had encountered during hospitalization, were able to distance themselves from the overall cancer experience.

Step 5 is the actual analysis of both the photographs and the interview materials in accordance with some established social science technique or procedure, or with the aim of exploring a particular theoretical concept or issue. There is considerable variability to be found here and the decision as to how to proceed is largely determined by the initial research question(s). The techniques chosen can be either quantitative or qualitative, or perhaps some combination. As we have noted, many of the earliest auto-photographic studies were carried out by social psychologists and these have a distinctively quantitative flavour. A recent auto-photographic study, which employed a systematic quantitative research design, was a large-scale comparative investigation of children's photographic practices (Sharples et al., 2003).

In this study a total of 180 children from three different age levels (7, 11 and 15) recruited from five European countries were provided with single-use cameras and asked to use them over the course of a weekend. The children took an initial total of 4300 photographs and they then participated in follow-up interviews during which 513 photographs were selected on which the analysis was conducted. Sharples and his colleagues carried out a complex analytical technique known as multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) which permits the data – in this case the coded content of the photographs – to be analysed using both axes of a standard

two-way frequency table simultaneously. Initial results of the MCA suggested that the photographs could be understood in terms of two axes: one which differentiated between photographs taken indoors as opposed to outdoors; and a second dimension which distinguished between photographs of people and those of objects or scenes. Four clusters of photographs were identified in the corpus: firstly, those depicting outdoor scenes without people; secondly, those of interiors and objects such as toys or games; thirdly, a group of photographs depicting people or gatherings indoors; and finally, a group showing people and events outdoors.

Sharples and his colleagues were primarily interested in the changes in children's photographic behaviour as they aged. The analysis suggested that a number of clear trends could be identified. Photographs by 7-year-old children were typically of their toys and similar possessions, a choice of photographic subject which declined markedly with age. In addition, 7-year-olds were more likely to take photographs of their home environment than older children. For 11-year-olds there were indications of an interest in taking photographs which depicted the outdoor environment – land, water and cityscapes. However, 11-year-olds, particularly girls, were more likely to take photographs of their pets than children of other ages. For 15-year-olds, photographs appeared to be predominantly concerned with aspects of their social world with scenes depicting groups of friends, in informal poses. Moreover, the friends photographed tended to be of the same sex as the photographer.

Sharples and his colleagues were able to shed further light on these statistical findings by turning to the comments offered by the children during their follow-up interviews. For example, they were able to discover some of the reasons why children took photographs, how they saw their photographic behaviour when compared with that of adults, and so on. In conclusion they argued that their research had challenged the view that children were immature or untutored users of cameras and wasteful consumers of film when they engage in photography. Children's photographs should not be simply seen as their 'view of the world' but an important means for them to articulate their sense of identity in relation to both parents and friends.

Quantitative participatory visual studies are, however, the exception and it is more common to find qualitative or interpretive approaches used in the analysis. In her auto-photographic study of mature age body-builders, Phoenix (2010) arrived at the concept of the 'body-self' after reviewing the photographs her respondents had taken and their commentaries on these. Three different 'body-self' identities were revealed: a 'healthy body-self', a 'performing body-self' and a 'relational body-self'. The diverse identities which her mature age body-builders exhibited appeared to challenge 'stereotypical assumptions' that such people were obsessed with their weight training and generally lead anti-social lives. In their study of marginalized black youth, Wright et al. (2010) turned to Goffman's well-known distinction between 'front stage' and 'back stage' regions (Goffman, 1959) in their analysis of the images and the comments made by their respondents during the interviews. They define front stage regions as comprising 'public spaces, schools, parks, streets, city centre', and so on. Back stage regions, in contrast, were those spaces such as family homes, bedrooms, living rooms, and relationships with friends. Wright et al. suggest that the limited number of photographs taken of

front regions might be one way in which the young people tried to account for their exclusion. In contrast the more numerous photographs of their back regions typically depicted relationships with friends which were a source of support in managing their perceived exclusion.

Step 6, the final step, concerns the way that the completed research is presented to a wider audience and this involves decisions about the balance between a focus on 'the talk', the interview discussions about the photographs, and a focus of the images. Generally speaking it is the former which is given priority with the visual material used as illustrations of key conceptual points. In some cases the visual material may not even be included. The absence of images may be the result of cost constraints; publishers of social science journals (and books) are often reluctant to include high-quality illustrations and colour images are generally out of the question. A further factor is that because the images have not been professionally taken they may not be of a suitable standard for publication. Finally, of course, given that empowerment is seen as a major dimension to this research, if the research subjects are reluctant to have their images viewed by a wider community then authors are unlikely to challenge this. Some branches of participatory visual health promotion research have employed group or collaborative research designs in which there is an expectation that the research findings will be widely disseminated. In these studies, participants are brought together on the basis of common interests or personal characteristics to take part in a group photographic project. Once images have been created, the group comes together again to discuss the photographs and develop titles or descriptions of selected images and this is often done with the goal of developing an exhibition for policy makers, health care providers and other influential advocates.

3.2 EXERCISE

The Inclusion of Visual Material in Participatory Visual Research Publications

Estimated time required: 1–2 hours for selecting articles and overviewing the issues. Allow more time for a more in-depth analysis.

As we have just noted, there has been a dramatic increase in the last decade in the number of research articles which have employed participant-centred visual methods such as auto-photography, photo-elicitation or photovoice. However, the exact role which the visual material plays in this research is not self-evident. Without exception these collaborative or participant-centred studies involve the researcher engaging in additional methods of data collection, most frequently some form of face-to-face interview, or focus group discussion. One consequence of this is that the visual material may play only a subordinate role in the published research article with the verbal responses from the interviews being assigned priority. In some cases none of the visual material even appears in the final publication.

Carry out a systematic investigation of this by examining journal articles which have employed these methods. Is there any obvious pattern to the appearance/non-appearance

of visual material? Do some issues or topics tend to favour the inclusion of visual material? When the article does include images, what purpose does the visual material appear to serve? Given that much of this literature emphasizes the theme of 'empowerment', to what extent do you think this might stem from the participants being part of a focus group discussion of their images rather than the actual taking of the photographs?

We conclude this section by noting that a recent postmodern or post-positivist twist in the uses of auto-photography and photo-elicitation involves these tools being turned onto the researcher themselves. The idea here is to generate reflexivity about identity and the research process by taking and looking at photographs of oneself in the field. A variant is to capture personally meaningful moments in the research process more generally using a camera. Kathleen Robbins (2008) wished to explore themes of gender, time and memory by attempting to inhabit the lifeworld of her own grandmother. She wore her clothing, cooked her handwritten recipes and performed the role of a 1950s hostess. Along the way she took photographs of herself, the recipes and the food. These assisted her in the task of capturing the past and offered a way to concretize the aesthetics and memory of each individual meal she prepared. The photographs could in turn serve as prompts for her creative and theoretical writing.

Photograph manipulation and experiments

Robbins sits at the humanities end of the spectrum for research involving auto-photography. Sharples and his colleagues have a comparative research design and might be thought of as having a more positivist style, even if they too are interested in meaning. Even further towards the science model are uses of photography in formally experimental and quasi-experimental quantitative research. Traditionally such research has involved presenting subjects with a series of photographs (the 'stimulus') and then following up with questionnaires and surveys asking about a theme of interest. Statistical analyses could be used to look for differences in responses to each of the photographs. Researchers might ask, for example, how likely the person in any given photograph is to become a friend, to be given a particular job, or how trustworthy they look. If the photographs vary by race, gender or other variables of interest then patterns of thinking (or prejudice) might be uncovered. For example, Jane Workman and Kim Johnson (1991) presented subjects with photographs of the same model wearing no cosmetics, moderate cosmetics and heavy cosmetics. They asked subjects to rate how likely the model was in each case to provoke sexual harassment. Statistical analyses of the ratings showed men were more likely than women to associate heavy cosmetic use with provoking sexual harassment. Both genders saw the woman

wearing cosmetics as more likely to be harassed than the same woman without. The implication that Workman and Johnson draw is that cosmetic use is likely to be misinterpreted as a sign of sexual availability or sexual interest, especially by men.

Although practitioners of this genre of research do not identify themselves as 'visual researchers' the fact remains that they make use of visual resources. More importantly, their research often powerfully confirms the significance of visual information and preferences in human life. The literature has investigated such profoundly sociological issues as selecting a marriage partner, adopting a particular child (looking cute helps), feeling warmly or coldly towards a stranger, evaluating social status, trustworthiness, competence or getting a job. Each of these variables might be influenced by physical appearance, even though research shows that assumptions based on appearance are often wrong. For example, the website whatsmyimage.com allowed users to upload photographs of themselves, then ask questions such as 'Does this person use drugs?' or 'Is this person gay?' or 'Does this person have a criminal record?'. Users of the sites provided thousands of yes or no responses. After users made their guess, the correct answer that had been provided by the uploader would be revealed. Using data from this website, social psychologists Christopher Y. Olivola and Alexander Todorov (2010) found that guessing based on aggregate statistical information (e.g. the percentage of drug users in the USA) was a better strategy than guessing based on the photographic image.

Three trends stand out in the most recent research that treats photographs as a formal experimental tool:

1 Software such as Photoshop allows the photographic stimulus to be manipulated so that the effects of a variable of key interest can be more precisely isolated and identified. For example, instead of showing photographs of white and black individuals as a prompt we might be able to show photographs of the same individual, or even a very lifelike computer-generated 'average person' with their skin colour very subtly altered. In this way the effect of skin colour is more precisely isolated from other somatic characteristics (face shape, hair, etc.). Research on the impacts of spots, scars, blotches and facial asymmetry also makes extensive use of this method (broadly they reduce attractiveness and trust). Body weight has become a key theme for investigation thanks to policy concerns about the 'obesity epidemic' and the possibility that Photoshop offers to manipulate the same individual's appearance on this single variable.
2 The field is increasingly a place where socio-biological and biomedical paradigms dominate. These claim that responses to physical markers (skin blemishes, facial symmetry, muscle tone, breasts, buttocks, hip to waist ratios) are hard wired into the brain as the key to genetic and reproductive fitness. Consequently the disciplines of psychology and evolutionary anthropology seem especially excited by this method.
3 Researchers are far more keenly aware of problems of subjects offering socially preferred responses or second-guessing the point of the exercise. For example, the findings of Workman and Johnson (above) can be contested. Perhaps men

were hypersensitive to a research context that was clearly about 'sexual harassment' and wanted to show that they understood that women might be vulnerable and misinterpreted. Projects increasingly include sneaky and creative methods to head off such socially preferred, intersubjectively complex responding.

We can trace these developments in two representative studies. Tracy Vaillancourt and Aanchal Sharma (2011) wanted to investigate competition between women. Drawing on socio-biological research on mate selection, they suggested that women would feel threatened by and reject a 'sexy attractive peer'. Female research subjects were presented with three photographs. These showed the same thin, attractive young woman dressed conservatively (the 'control'), dressed provocatively (short skirt, cropped top revealing her midriff, etc.) and also Photoshop enhanced in the same provocative outfit as 'sexy fat'. The subjects then answered a questionnaire. The women said they were significantly less likely to introduce the 'sexy thin' woman to their boyfriends. They were also less likely to have her as a friend. The 'sexy fat' woman was also not popular. Vaillancourt and Sharma interpret this as reflecting a worry that a sexually available woman would be a 'mate poacher'. Social exclusion was a way of controlling such women by keeping them away from the pool of men. As a check on the method using photographs the researchers also had a confederate dressed either as a conservative or 'sexy' lab assistant enter the room while the subjects were engaged in a mundane task. Video recordings from hidden cameras allowed involuntary micro-expressions of contempt and hostility towards the 'sexy' assistant to be subsequently coded. Before leaving this apparently convincing case study, however, we must suggest an alternative explanation that is far more sociological. That is, the women were rejecting a peer who dressed in a bad taste 'trashy' style that was inappropriate in a university setting. This would explain the prevalence of micro-expressions of contempt rather than simply hostility. A better research design might have pitched a 'sexy conservative' against a 'frumpy conservative'.

Coming from a sociological perspective, Dalton Conley and Brian McCabe (2011) stress that standards of attractiveness and gendered behaviour are not universally rooted in biology. In this way they differ from Vaillancourt and Sharma. Still, they agree that physical attractiveness has documented significant outcomes. These can pertain in social fields like the labour and marriage markets as much as in the gene pool. Conley and McCabe wished to explore the role of body mass index (BMI) in attractiveness ratings. Photographs of confederates were computer manipulated to offer high and low BMI versions of the same person. An Internet survey was used where raters were asked whether the images were attractive or not. Clearly socially preferred responding is a problem here. People will not wish to say that a fat person is ugly to them. To get around this Conley and McCabe make use of an ingenious method of substitution where respondents are asked how many people in a group of photographs they found attractive, but not which subjects in particular. Once a baseline is established, the photographic group presented to subjects can be

systematically manipulated and differences from the baseline observed. Two findings stood out from this project. Firstly, the BMI of the subject (in a photograph) was more important for male than for female raters when it came to rating attractiveness. Secondly, the BMI of males in photographs did not seem to have any impact on ratings of attractiveness, but that of females did. This finding of asymmetry might have real implications for issues such as the composition of a job interview panel or the likely levels of prejudice to be faced by overweight men versus overweight women in the dating and marriage markets.

3.3 PROJECT

'Reading' People Through Photographs

Estimated time required: Most of the time in this project will be taken in preparing the photographs and planning for responses. The preparation phase may be upwards of 2 hours depending on how many images you are planning to take and which settings are involved. The response and analysis phase of this project will take at least 1 hour, but for a more involved project allow extra time to improve methodological validity.

As the examples above make clear, experiments making use of photographs are a great way to investigate prejudice and the way we 'read' other people. As sociologists we feel that themes of class and taste are particularly amenable to investigation and that these are just as interesting as currently popular ones relating to physical attractiveness and sexuality, trustworthiness or competence.

Take photographs of the same individual in diverse settings and wearing clothing denoting varying levels of class and cultural capital. Recruit a number of your friends or family members aiming, if possible, for a demographic spread with regard to gender and age. After showing the photographs, ask your respondents about dependent variables that interest you. For example, would they give this person a certain job (suggest a range of jobs)? Is the subject likely to have a certain job? Perhaps you might ask if they would go on a date with the subject of the photographs. Clearly the possibilities are endless here for investigating stereotypes and preferences. Further manipulations involving race and gender are easily accomplished. If you want to push this project further then the list method used by Conley and McCabe might offer greater methodological validity.

The analysis of existing visual materials

Researcher-generated visual material in the form of still photography or ethnographic film has historically been associated with British social anthropology and more recently, in its sociological revival, with the USA. In contrast, the third approach to conducting image-based visual inquiry which we examine, concerning the analysis of already existing visual images, emerged first

within Europe. In the influential continental traditions of structuralism and semiotics, photographs are 'texts' for analysis and interpretation with the researcher or scholar playing no part in their production. Roland Barthes' work (e.g. Barthes 1977a; 1977b; 1981) on the photograph as a sign provides the primary exemplar here but there has also been some important work on analysing photography from a broadly Foucauldian perspective. This links the taking of photographs by institutions such as the police, welfare and social reform bodies, hospitals and educational institutions to an interest in the surveillance and control of populations (Tagg, 1988; McHoul, 1991). In this section we will provide an initial overview of some of the key work that has been conducted in this tradition, but we also discuss alternative approaches to the analysis of existing images. Here we will present our second case study – Goffman's famous investigation of advertising images – and we will also consider some of the work which has used photographs as archival records or historical documents.

For Barthes, and others who work in the semiotic tradition, the primary issue is the interpretation of the photograph and its place in a system of cultural representation. Barthes' work, nevertheless, entails something of a paradox in relation to the use of photographs as visual data to the extent that he emphasizes the centrality of verbal elements in accounting for their meaning. In his famous essay 'Rhetoric of the image', Barthes (1977b) came to argue that the meaning of images is always related to and dependent upon an accompanying verbal text. He looked at an advertisement showing a box of pasta with the name 'Panzani' and a table covered with vegetables falling out of a shopping bag. In this case the word 'Panzani' signified 'Italian-ness'. The vegetables then became interpretable via a semiotic cascade in this context as fresh, vibrant, fun and above all 'Italian'. All images are seen by Barthes as potentially unstable 'polysemous' signifiers that can generate 'a "floating chain" of signifieds'. Hence, Barthes argued, 'in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs; the linguistic message is one of these techniques' (1977b: 39). We shall explore the core ideas in the semiotic tradition in Chapter 4 in the context of examples of research which illustrate Barthes' key terms of anchorage and relay.

Stuart Hall (1973; 1997; Hall et al., 1980) has been one of the leading contemporary figures in the cultural analysis of images and has contributed significantly to the establishment of semiotics within the repertoire of qualitative research tools. In an early paper examining newspaper photographs, Hall (1973) argues we should decode these images in terms of Barthes' distinction between connotation and denotation. Denotation is 'precise, literal, unambiguous' (p. 226) while codes of connotation 'are more open-ended' (ibid.). Hall argues that the 'expressive codes' determining gesture and facial expression can often play a major role in shaping these connotations. By comparing photographs from various papers issued on the same day, he shows how a

head and shoulders photograph of a politician who quit office denotes the politician, but can take on varying connotations depending on the expressive codes at work. The politician can be shown to be 'angry', 'defiant', 'tragic' or 'resigned'. Hall suggests that in determining which connotation is valid we have to draw upon our stock of common-sense knowledge in order to make a reading of the image in terms of its expressive content. This can involve knowledge about our society, the meanings of its symbols and the codes that govern face, body and posture. Hall argues that in the context of news photography, expressive codes and connotations often combine to give an ideological value to the photographic sign, by positioning newsworthy events within a 'moral-political discourse' (p. 231).

Hall demonstrates this thesis with reference to a photograph of a demonstrator kicking a police officer (Figure 3.2). According to Hall, the denotated message 'a man in crowded scene is kicking a policeman' is ideologically read as 'anti-war demonstrators are violent people who threaten the state and assault policemen unfairly'. For Hall the extraordinary power of the

THE KICK-PHOTO
Photo: Keystone Agency

Figure 3.2 *Newspaper photograph of a policeman being kicked, from Stuart Hall 'The determinations of news photographs'* in S. Cohen and J. Young (eds) (1973) *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, social problems and the mass media*. London: Constable. (Photo: Keystone Agency.)

news photograph lies in its ability to obscure its own ideological dimensions by appearing as a 'literal visual-transcription of the real world' (p. 241). Selection and framing decisions made by photographers and editors are ignored (the newspaper might have printed, for example, a picture of a demonstrator being hit by the police) and so we tend to read such photographs as a truthful document of what really happened, ignoring the possibility of other interpretations of the event.

Hall's own take in his exploration of British news photographs of the 1970s is to read the hidden forces behind them as those of authoritarian capitalism. According to Hall, the media played a key role in maintaining public support for harsh policing. This ideology also projected the blame for social problems such as mugging onto minority groups. As a result the systematic inequalities arising from capitalism were excluded from public analysis. It is worth remembering, however, that the press have often been attacked by the right as a liberal enclave. In the USA, for example, the press were accused of hounding Republican President Richard Nixon out of the White House but of supporting Bill Clinton during his impeachment. It is quite probable, then, that the ideological values embodied in news photographs might vary from place to place and time to time. They may also be expected to vary according to the constituency, ownership and editorial control of each paper.

3.4 EXERCISE

News Photographs

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes as an in-class exercise (it may be necessary to source the newspapers in advance to save time).

Locate pictures in your nation's newspapers dealing with phenomena such as an industrial dispute, or public protests such as the 'Occupy Wall Street' demonstrations which lasted for several months in 2011 and which extended beyond the USA to a number of other countries. (Note: You may need to access the online newspaper archives to obtain these.) Decode them in terms of denotation and connotation. What kinds of ideologies and values do you find hidden in the photographs? Now look at the accompanying text in the newspaper or perhaps at the editorial section. Are there any clues here to suggest your reading of the photographs was correct?

Note: It may be instructive to compare photographs and coverage in two newspapers with different political outlooks (e.g. in the UK the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*). In this way issues of ideological framing in news photographs can be dramatically foregrounded.

Most work on the ideological force of photographs has centred on a neo-Gramscian decoding of news photographs and more recently news footage. Investigation of the deeper resonances of photographs need not be restricted to the news arena. Nor do they have to be grounded in critical theory. One of the best examples of an alternative approach is Peter Hamilton's (1997) work on

French humanist photography from the end of the Second World War until the late 1950s. This is the photography of public life associated with great names such as Robert Doisneau, Willy Ronis and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Hamilton argues that the 'dominant representational paradigm' of these photographs was one which attempted to capture a quintessential 'Frenchness'. While the photographs were intended and promoted as 'documentary' photojournalism about everyday life by magazines such as *Paris Match* and *Life*, the selection of images from the infinite universe of potential images inevitably involved subjective and cultural elements. According to Hamilton, images of the French humanists promoted themes of community, happiness and solidarity. They celebrated everyday life through pictures of street life, cafés, children, lovers and homes. These themes can be illustrated with reference to Doisneau's famous picture of a young couple kissing outside the Hotel de Ville (we do not have permission to include the photograph but it is widely available on the Web). Hamilton notes that the couple are dressed as 'ordinary' people and that we view the scene from an 'ordinary' café table. Other persons in the picture are also members of the *classe populaire* (note the humble beret) and they are going about their ordinary business. The picture depicts the universal human emotion of love and situates it as a slice of everyday life in the streets. The overall effect allows the viewer to feel empathy and a sense of commonality with the persons in the photograph and to appreciate the joy of human sociability.

Hamilton's interpretation of the paradigm is almost Durkheimian. He sees the French humanists as responding to a crisis in French identity. German occupation and French collaboration during the Second World War had threatened and dishonoured French national identity. Humanist photography operated as an integrating force by offering inclusive and attractive definitions of Frenchness. It spoke of the importance of solidarity and human association among ordinary people. Hamilton's work, then, suggests that we should look at genres of photographs as a whole and try to identify key themes. These can then be related to the decoding of individual images, on the one hand, and to underlying social processes, forces and values on the other. While these may be 'political' in orientation, they might also refer to less contested cultural needs such as issues of identity and the search for the good society. The way particular images relate to more general and distant background narratives is further explored in Philip Smith's (2011) look at iconic process in the case of the Woodstock Music Festival. Considered as a high point of the 1960s, Woodstock, Smith argues, is 'iconic' in two senses. It is a dominant (non-visual) shorthand symbol for the counter-cultural values of the time (peace, love, etc.) and also a series of instantly recognizable visual images. Smith (2011: 172) writes that the 'immediate synchronic experience of sensing' needs to be aligned with 'a more epistemic, discursive, diachronic, myth-driven background' in order for full-blown iconic power to emerge. Shared stories about historical events that are outside the immediate visual field can provide a starting point for ordering this process. In the case of Woodstock, images typically feature young people having

fun, often naked, using drugs or covered in mud (these can easily be found on the Internet). Whereas Barthes stressed that the photograph and its accompanying text anchor each other, in this case more diffuse narratives of Woodstock help people make sense of the images rather than any particular individual tag line, balloon, caption or script that is physically present on the same page. Photographs that might be interpreted as amoral, pornographic or unhygienic are read as a celebration by virtue of the viewer's common-sense familiarity with the wider stories that construct the event as a special time of ritual bonding and sharing. However, conservatives, with their counter-narrative of Woodstock as depraved, stand outside this circuit of interpretation that generates iconic power. So the image has no automatic ideological impact through stealthy signifying chains as Barthes maintains. Nor does it require proximate text to be understood. Rather, prior narrative beliefs, collective memories and value commitments shape the interpretation and recognition of connotations within the images themselves.

Not all of the work that has been carried out on the analysis of existing images has drawn on critical theory, visual hermeneutics or literary semiotics. Occasionally studies have appeared which are truly innovative and which take their intellectual bearings from disciplines that have been largely ignored by the visual research community. Goffman's analysis of advertising images, which draws on ethological understandings of ritual display in the animal kingdom, is one such work and we turn to consider this now as the second of our extended case studies.

CASE STUDY 2

Goffman and *Gender Advertisements*

If *Balinese Character* represents the high point in researcher-produced visual materials, then Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979) is frequently lauded as an exemplar of the use of existing visual data. On the face of it they would appear to have little in common but closer inspection suggests that this is not the case. Although both the substance and provenance of the images analysed are different, the two studies share a number of methodological similarities. We have already noted that Goffman's research was originally published in an anthropological journal, which gives us some clues. Goffman does refer to *Balinese Character* in his own book but only once in a rather pointed aside, somewhat inconspicuously located in a footnote. The context is his adoption of Bateson and Mead's idea of 'kinaesthetic learning', the term they use for a form of instruction in Balinese society in which children are physically taken through the steps or movements of a behavioural sequence, such as a dance or ceremony, by an adult. In the commercial advertisements which are his focus, Goffman reports that 'men seem to be pictured

(Continued)

(Continued)

instructing women this way more than the reverse'. His footnote to *Balinese Character* runs as follows:

> This book brilliantly pioneered in the use of pictures for study of what can be neatly pictured. The work stimulated a whole generation of anthropologists to take pictures. However, very little analysis was – and perhaps could be – made of what these students collected. Somehow a confusion occurred between human interest and the analytical kind. Dandy movies and stills were brought home of wonderful people and fascinating events, but to little avail. Much respect and affection was shown the natives and little of either for the analytical use that can be made of pictures. (Goffman 1979: 34, note 10)

There is more than a suggestion here that Goffman believed his own work should be anointed as the rightful analytical descendant in the tradition of visual analysis. Is this justified? There are certainly similarities between the two studies. Perhaps the most surprising given that they share a provenance in anthropology is that they both rely initially on sheer quantitative incidence to make their respective points. Goffman includes 508 images, somewhat less than Bateson but from a potential pool conceivably equalling – if not surpassing – the 25,000 the latter had available. Both studies, therefore, seek to prioritize the use of visual depiction by the simple technique of presenting their photographic images en masse with a minimum of accompanying text. Goffman's comment regarding the advantages of using photographic materials in this way could apply equally to Bateson's work. He suggests that a researcher:

> can exploit the vast social competency of the eye and the impressive consensus sustained by viewers. Behavioural configurations which he has insufficient literary skill to summon up through words alone, he can unambiguously introduce into consideration. His verbal glosses can serve as a means to direct the eye to what is to be seen, instead of having to serve as a full rendition of what is at issue. (Goffman, 1979: 25)

Consequently the two books look similar. As is the case with *Balinese Character*, the visual material in *Gender Advertisements* is prefaced by a purely verbal discussion of the subject. In Goffman's case this serves to introduce the reader to his core theoretical concern with the micro-rituals of gender display and, secondly, an intriguing account of the epistemological issues which attend the taking of photographs and what is thereby represented. In part, Goffman returns to themes which he had already rehearsed in his earlier, more philosophically inflected, work *Frame Analysis* (1974). Finally both studies use similar devices to present their visual material with the close juxtaposition of thematically related images on the same page. Goffman arranges his visual material into five categories: 'relative size', 'the feminine touch', 'function ranking', 'the family', 'the ritualization of subordination' and finally 'licensed withdrawal', which accounts for nearly half of all the images presented (Figure 3.3). In Goffman's case the images span both pages and his accompanying verbal text has a decidedly more theoretical flavour than the largely ethnographic commentary which Bateson provides. But the major distinction between the two studies, of course, is that Bateson procured his own visual material whereas Goffman chose to analyse already-generated commercial photographs.

50 GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS

207–16 The note of unseriousness struck by a childlike guise is struck by another styling of the self, this one perhaps entirely restricted to advertisements, namely, the use of the entire body as a playful gesticulative device, a sort of body clowning:

207

210

214

211

215

208

212

209

213

216

Figure 3.3 *'The Ritualization of Subordination'*, page 50 from Goffman, *Gender Advertisements* (1979). London: Macmillan (originally published in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication,* 3 (2), 1976). These advertising images illustrate examples of what Goffman refers to as 'the ritualization of subordination', in this case adoption of a 'childlike guise' or 'body clowning' by the adult figures. His point is principally to show that it is almost always women who are depicted as ritually subordinate, but note his use of the black marking (lower right image) to illustrate a 'deviant case' where a male is portrayed as exhibiting this characteristic.

Goffman's categories for the analysis of the display of gender have proved to be durable and they have inspired a number of studies of photographic images, other than those of commercially produced advertising content, where the production or accomplishment of femininity or masculinity has been a core research focus. The plethora of 'gendered' images which are publicly available on social media websites has recently proved to be one of the most fertile arenas in which his theoretical concepts have been employed and we consider some of the research which has been produced in this virtual visual domain in Chapter 8. In general, the literature emerging from *Gender Advertisements* has endorsed Goffman's findings, but often with small caveats. This pattern has even been the case for positivist work seeking to place his intuitions on a firmer methodological foundation. For example, Philip Bell and Marko Milic (2002) coded 827 advertisements from a range of popular Australian magazines using formal criteria taken from Goffman and also from Gunther Kress and Leo van Leeuwen (1996). These included things such as the relative height of viewer and subject, the direction of gaze, and the location of subjects in the frame (high, low, left, right). They conclude that for the most part 'advertisements featuring female participants are often still different from those featuring males' (1996: 219). However, they also note that magazine advertising today frequently presents men in ways that are similar to women, this perhaps reflecting the emergence of new forms of masculinity. They speculate that male purchasers of cosmetics and clothing are increasingly narcissistic, seductive and consumerist and that the ritualized forms of gaze and presentation of self previously directed at women might have been exported over recent decades. Clearly there is a mandate for time-series research here.

The two works which we have presented as case studies of their modalities of visual research practice – *Balinese Character* and *Gender Advertisements* – have set standards which are rarely matched by other researchers. A useful way to try to highlight the analytical strengths of these studies, and the two traditions in visual inquiry which they exemplify, would be to conduct your own modest photographic project based on the following suggestions.

3.5 PROJECT

Documentary Photography Versus the Analysis of Existing Images

Estimated time required: This is an excellent project for a research assignment, and upwards of 5 hours or more is needed to adequately source and compare images. It may be worthwhile completing this task as part of a group assignment.

As we have suggested in this chapter, one of the major distinctions in conventional visual social science is between the researcher who takes photographs

(e.g. Bateson) and the researcher who uses existing images (e.g. Goffman). This project requires you to undertake both strategies in order to familiarize yourself with different ways of working with photographs, and to learn about their comparative merits and problems. As there is quite a lot of work involved, you may wish to complete this with other people.

1 First, select a group or sub-culture in which you have an interest. This might be participants in a sport (e.g. a basketball club), people who share the same hobby (e.g. stamp collectors), fans of a particular musical sub-culture (e.g. punks), or perhaps even colleagues of your educational institution.
2 Next take a series of documentary photographs which aim to faithfully record the activities of this group. Try to take an anthropological or sociological approach, with an interest in the 'way of life' within the activity, the values of its members and their forms of sociability.
3 The third step is to collect existing images of people involved in the same activity as the group you study. You should be able to find these in commercial magazines devoted to the particular interest of the participants, or in promotional material advertising the group or activity. Authorized websites are also a good potential source of images.
4 Compile two brief (750-word) photo essays (text with accompanying photographs or vice versa) which provide a simple overview of the activity you have chosen.
5 Now compare and evaluate the two methods in terms of the following criteria: (a) the account of the activity each offers (e.g. glamorous, mundane, gendered, formal, informal); (b) the 'objectivity' of each approach as a true record of what 'really goes on' in a particular activity (e.g. what got into the photographic record and what did not); (c) the flexibility of the approach (e.g. limitations on topics that can be covered in the photo essay using each method); (d) the resources used for each project (time, money, equipment, etc.). What seem to be the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? What have you learnt about the ability role of photographs in assisting social research?

We hope your experiences with this project draw attention to the difficulties inherent in capturing social life photographically and in making use of the results.

Other uses of existing visual material: using photographs as historical documents

An important strand in work on existing visual material has been to exploit the potential that photographs offer as means of accessing the past. Photographs are objects which typically have special significance and as a consequence are collected and kept. They are the primary way by which families can store, share and memorialize their collective biographies, while for organizations and institutions in the public realm – schools, hospitals, corporations – they serve as an important way of preserving records of their

origins, growth and achievements. Photographs, in short, have a key role to play in research, particularly where a concern with social change is a significant component.

Textbooks on documentary methods have frequently discussed their potential. John Scott (1991), for example, includes photographs as part of his discussion of the use of 'personal documents' – such things as letters, diaries and autobiographies – in social research. He argues that photographs should be regarded in the same light as handwritten or printed documents; that is, they should be considered as 'texts whose meaning must be disclosed like any other' (Scott 1991: 185). For Scott all documentary source material must be assessed with four key criteria in mind: **authenticity**, **credibility**, **representativeness** and **meaning**. However, these criteria raise rather different questions in the case of photographs than they do in the case of the majority of documentary source material. The question of authenticity, for example, does not really arise in the case of photographs despite the fact that it may be an important issue in the case of visual material such as paintings. Originality and authenticity have historically been central to the assessment of paintings as 'works of art'. But, as Scott notes, the idea of an 'original' photograph makes no sense as the very nature of photographs is that they are reproducible images.[7]

However, the credibility of photographs as documentary evidence is more of an issue. Scott has in mind here the question of the technical control which the photographer can exert over the final production of the photograph. Although this may not involve the use of props or forms of 'dark-room trickery', the fact that the photographer plays an active role in producing the final image must mean that a photograph should be considered to be a selective account of reality. A researcher must always be alert to these possibilities in interpreting any photographic image:

> At the level of literal understanding, for example, a photograph of a Victorian family may appear to give us evidence about dress styles, affluence, and demeanour, and also about attitudes, intimacy and formality in family relations. Similarly the background may provide evidence on street activity and forms of transport, and on occupational and residential segregation. But can these perceptions be relied upon? Were the family dressed in 'Sunday best' and adopting a pose and what part did the photographer play in constructing the scene? (Scott, 1991: 191)

Hall (1991) raises a different, but equally important, set of considerations in his discussion of the problems of interpretation attending the photographic record of the history of black settlement in the UK during the 1950s. Hall's argument is that many of the photographs which could serve as documentary evidence of post-war migration have already

[7]For a useful discussion of this see Walter Benjamin (1973).

'made a public appearance in the field of representation' and as a consequence will have already acquired meanings and inflections through their earlier positioning within the discourses of the news-photo agency, the photographic studio or magazine colour supplement. For Hall this means that:

> It is difficult, if not by now impossible, to recapture the earlier meanings of these photographs. In any event, the search for their 'essential Truth' – an original founding moment of meaning – is an illusion. The photographs are essentially multi-accentual in meaning. No such previously natural moment of true meaning, untouched by the codes and social relations of production and reading, and transcending historical time, exists … Black historians, especially, handling these explosive little 'documents', will have to steer their way through the increasingly narrow passage which separates the old Scylla of 'documentary realism as Truth' from the new Charybdis of a too-simplistic 'avant-gardism'. (1991: 152–153)

Whereas Scott approaches the question of photographic credibility rather more as a positivist might canvass the issue of reliability, Stuart Hall appears to undercut the positivist assumption that, with sufficient care and a large enough sample to inspect, an accurate assessment of the photographic record can be gauged. For Hall the idea that the original meaning of an image can somehow be grasped is futile, a position which would seem to cast some doubt on its documentary value as anything other than text for hermeneutic analysis.

In relation to the interpretation of a photograph – the meaning which can be reasonably assigned to it – Scott suggests that the issue which underpins this is a knowledge of its genre: specifically whether it was produced professionally in a studio or, alternatively, a 'home-mode' variety. This is relevant in that commercial photographers would have exerted far more control over the photographic subjects and the context in which they were taken. The use of various props, backgrounds and poses were subject to changing fashions; moreover, 'the subjects of studio photographs have in general acquiesced in the aesthetic contexts chosen for the pictures' (Scott, 1991: 193). Scott argues that studio portraiture would have drawn significantly upon historically accepted family and gender roles:

> Photographer and subject connived to present a stylised presentation: who is seated and who standing symbolise authority relations, and whether the subjects are smiling or serious can convey an image of respectability or conviviality … Nevertheless, a close examination of studio photographs can often disclose discrepancies between the image and the reality: a middle-class drawing room setting for people in ill-fitting and shabby clothes can signal social aspirations rather than established social standing. (p. 193)

Home-mode photography, although generally less concerned with the technical or aesthetic issues of the studio variety, nevertheless can reveal a good deal

about the assumptions governing family life provided that the researcher is 'attuned to the conventions' which are drawn upon in the generation of such images. Finally he stresses that documentary researchers should not assume that the photographs which can be found in archives or private collections are necessarily representative of all those which were taken. For example, photographs which are technically deficient or, possibly more importantly, which did not seem to fit the desired family self-image, may be discarded.

The use of visual materials generated by video technology

The final approach we consider is the use of video technology. To a greater extent than the other modalities we have examined, the use of video offers some of the clearest evidence of the diversity in theoretical and methodological stances that can be found within the visual research community. Stated in its bluntest form, there appear to be two distinct approaches to how video can be utilized in social research with virtually no cross-fertilization – or even recognition of each other's existence – apparent. We have touched on the basis of the division between these two approaches elsewhere in the chapter: on the one hand, the appropriation of the camera as the means to collect data for its scientific, realist or evidentiary uses, versus the camera as a medium through which knowledge can be collaboratively and reflexively constructed, on the other.

The distinction between these two approaches is, however, long standing and it is one which ramifies through much of the history of visual inquiry and its relation to ethnography, particularly within anthropology. Cameras and film recording equipment were considered essential items in the anthropologist's toolkit. The earliest practitioners such as A. C. Haddon and Spencer and Gillen, who undertook research at the turn of the nineteenth century on Torres Strait Island communities and Australian Aborigines respectively, and Boas who conducted fieldwork with the Kwakiutl Indians of the Pacific Northwest, saw film as the means to best record the atmosphere and sensory experience of the rituals they observed. Culture was understood by these pioneers as a lived, embodied totality, as something that can be observed and documented. Although the traditional methodology of participant observation could go some way to grasping this totality, the use of visual recording technology was seen as means of more faithfully capturing and preserving these cultural mores and processes.

The earliest realist appropriation of film, of course, predates the emergence of anthropological visual fieldwork and is to be found in the studies of animal locomotion and human movement carried out by Eadweard

Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey in the late nineteenth century. Such studies laid the foundation for later applied uses of film to study work organization and efficiency carried out by Frank Gilbreth in the 1920s. Gilbreth, a follower of F. W. Taylor's 'scientific management', was particularly interested in the way in which factory workers performed tasks and tried to find means to eliminate excess movement and streamline routine processes. But Gilbreth also filmed surgeons at work and noticed that they spent more time on searching for instruments than on performing the actual operating procedures. He recommended the introduction of a practice that remains in place today: that surgeons should extend the palm of their hand and state the name of the instrument they require, which would be provided by a nursing assistant. This enabled the surgeon to concentrate on the incision and thus save valuable time. A third strand in this realist use of film can be found in fields such as kinesics – more commonly known as the study of body language and gesture. Pioneers such as Ray Birdwhistell (1970) used slow-motion footage of people talking to investigate the role of gesture, gaze and body alignment in communication. These themes have all been extensively revisited and developed in recent decades.

Within anthropology, as we noted earlier, the scientific or realist use of recording technology remained largely dominant until the 1990s when new theoretical currents such as postmodernism and post-colonialism, which raised critical questions about the status of scientific knowledge, came to the fore. The concern for scientific objectivity and truth characteristic of the older approaches to visual inquiry fell out of favour, and in its place came a concern with how visual work needed to address questions of identity and subjectivity. In the last decade visual ethnography in anthropology has witnessed a number of innovations which have been made possible by the widespread availability and adoption of digital video technology. This contemporary ethnographic video work is characterized by a reflexive appreciation of the ways that knowledge is generated as part of the recording process. Exponents of experimental video ethnography such as Pink (2007) have also suggested that it provides much richer opportunities for the representation and dissemination of research findings – for example, through hypermedia – as well as a means to empower research subjects through participatory methodologies similar to those we examined earlier. In Pink's view reflexive video work has now become dominant in the social sciences.

But this is not the case. Paradoxically, at the same time that experimental or reflexive approaches to the use of video are being avidly pursued within anthropology, a radically different approach to the possibilities afforded by video technology has (re-)emerged on the agenda of sociology and a number of other social science disciplines, one which remains firmly focused on its

ability to capture data for analysis. We refer here to researchers working within the conversation analysis (CA) tradition for whom an interest in the visual recording of interaction has become a natural extension of the audio recordings which served as the foundation for this field.[8] However, in contrast to the early CA work which was largely carried out on audio recordings of ordinary conversation, the use of video has been taken up by researchers whose concern is with workplace environments – particularly, but not exclusively, those involving the use of technology such as computers or other forms of visual display: police and other emergency service workers, air traffic and underground rail controllers, medical interaction and surgery (examples of these studies can be found in Luff et al., 2000, and Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 2010). Here the focus has become the complex ways in which the participants in these work settings coordinate their work tasks through both their talk and the array of artefacts, tools and monitors which are at hand. Through the use of video recording – and the powerful conceptual resources which three decades of CA inquiry have delivered – genuine advances in the ways that human conduct is organized have become possible. Heath et al., who have pioneered the use of video in work settings, capture the sense of radical breakthrough which video has yielded in the following passage:

> If the key principle of qualitative research is taking the participant's perspective seriously and prioritising the resources on which people rely in accomplishing their everyday actions and activities, then a technology that enables the repeated, fine-grained scrutiny of moments of social life and sociability would seem to provide, at worst, a compliment to the more conventional techniques for gathering 'scientific' information, at best, a profound realignment akin to the effect of the microscope on biology. (2010: 2–3)

[8]It is interesting to note that in the final section of his – largely overlooked – preliminary comments to *Gender Advertisements* Goffman alludes to the possibilities which film or video technology can bring. Goffman refers to the existence of a 'class of behavioural practices' which are particularly suited for image analysis. He refers to these practices as 'small behaviours whose physical forms are fairly well codified even though the social implications or meaning of the acts may have vague elements, and which are realized in their entirety, from beginning to end, in a brief period of time and a small space. These behavioural events can be recorded and their image made retrievable by means of audio and video tapes and camera. (Tape and film, unlike a still, provide not only a recoverable image of the actual activity in question but also an appreciable collection of these records. More important, audio and video recordings of very small behaviours facilitate micro-functional study, *that is an examination of the role of a bit of behaviour in the stream which precedes, co-occurs, and follows*.) (Goffman, 1979: 24, emphasis added)

We can observe here a very different attitude on Goffman's part to the methodological dictates concerning the exploration of naturally occurring forms of social interaction from that which he has conventionally been associated. See, for example, the references to his methodological 'sleight of hand' in Schegloff (1988). See above p.28.

We do not propose to venture too far into the use of video in our book. However, a number of the projects and exercises that we suggest readers could attempt in later chapters, which are based on observation through the eye, could be modified to incorporate video recording and we will comment on this where appropriate.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have attempted to provide a summary of the diversity of work which is currently being conducted within the field of visual research. The four approaches or modalities we have outlined have in common the fact that they rely on recording equipment – camera, video recorder – or are based upon the investigation of the products of these technologies. Notwithstanding our appreciation of some aspects of the field, two reservations need to be made at this juncture. Firstly, the use of photography by anthropologists, sociologists and ethnographers has generally led to an insular and theoretically uninspiring sub-field. Visual inquiry based on still photography has, for the most part, failed to connect with the wider currents in social theory in these disciplines. Photographs have tended to be used in a purely illustrative or documentary fashion. Sometimes it is hard to see how academic uses of the camera have progressed much beyond the photo essay of the Sunday newspaper supplements. Can it be coincidental that the work held in highest regard by the general academic community which has employed photographs – that of Bateson and Mead, Goffman, Hall, etc. – has not been by a self-proclaimed visual researcher? We would suggest not. It is precisely because these figures came to visual research from outside the camp that they had clearly defined theoretical agendas. It is this grounding in social theory which gives their visual work an audience and intellectual weight.

Our second reservation is that visual research – in all its manifestations – has been commonsensically equated with and confined to the study of images. As we have noted in earlier sections of the book, issues relating to observability, space and the visible material world in general provide fertile avenues for visual inquiry. Our intention in this book is to address these two deficiencies. In moving beyond the image in general and the photograph in particular, we will argue that visual research can become a powerful and theoretically driven dimension of social and cultural inquiry. The next chapter begins this journey.

4

Two-Dimensional Visual Data: Photographs and Beyond

This chapter will:

- Consider the ways in which two-dimensional images can serve as data for social and cultural inquiry in addition to their conventional use as 'texts' for interpretation.
- Discuss the ways images can be investigated using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.
- Continue to move beyond the reliance of visual research on photographic images by exploring the use of other common, but less frequently investigated, visual material such as cartoons, information posters and signage.
- Provide students with concepts and skills for becoming critical consumers of visual texts.
- Broaden the theoretical foundations of visual research by discussing the ways in which two-dimensional visual data can be subject to both semiotic and ethnomethodological investigations.

In the previous chapter we argued that visual research should advance beyond its preoccupation with images. However a logical consequence of our call for visual research to become a far wider 'sociology of the seen' is that we must include consideration of these selfsame images purely on the grounds that images – in their numerous manifestations – are perhaps the most basic form through which we experience the visuality of contemporary life. Nevertheless, there are a number of additional points that need to be made here which serve to differentiate our efforts from those of the mainstream visual research community. In the first instance, the use of

photographic images – the principal subject of the previous chapter and the mainstay of the majority of visual research – will be de-emphasized, and we will devote much more attention to other examples of media texts and images[1] as well as forms of visual imagery which are not part of the mass media, such as directional signs and maps. Collectively we refer to these forms of data as 'two-dimensional': we encounter them on the pages of newspapers or magazines, on advertising billboards, or as signage erected to assist us as we navigate our way through urban complexes such as hospitals, universities or shopping centres. Perhaps more important, however, is the analytical stance we adopt in relation to this data. Although we will consider the prevailing semiotic approach taken by most media studies work, which treats images or signs as 'texts' which can be interrogated for cultural or ideological themes, we also want to see how they can be approached rather more sociologically. This means looking at the ways in which they might serve as data – that is, as sources of concrete visual information about the abstract concepts and processes which are central to organizing everyday social life. Not all visual or media and communications research, however, has a cultural studies emphasis on ideology and interpretation. An alternative approach, which we shall also examine, has been taken by researchers working within the ethnomethodological tradition who have used visual materials as sites for the explication of commonsense reasoning. Here the focus is not so much on the discovery of the hidden cultural meanings that might be assigned to texts or signs by the analyst, but rather on the ways in which ordinary actors use or make sense of this visual information in the course of their everyday practical routines.

Getting away from the semiotic paradigm, however, is not as easy as it might seem precisely *because* the kinds of two-dimensional (2D) images on which we want to focus have invariably been artfully constructed as things which invite interpretation. Common sense seems to tell us that it is more natural to think of items such as photographs, advertisements, cartoons or signs as things which are meant to be decoded. Their use as indicators of underlying concepts and processes of social life is less obvious. This situation is exacerbated when one considers that the prevailing interpretive approaches to the analysis of visual materials tend to be restricted to a relatively small number of examples, which works against the discovery of generalizable information. Paradoxically, it is the more neglected quantitative

[1]It is not our intention to consider 'the media' in their entirety. This would be an undertaking beyond the scope of one book, never mind a single chapter. Accordingly we will have nothing to say about television, film or the visual arts more broadly as sources of information for visual inquiry. Research on these has tended to be the preserve of specialist departments with literary or cultural interests or else, when conducted by social science investigators, it requires expensive equipment as well as lengthy data-collection phases which generally place this kind of activity outside the reach of undergraduate students.

tradition of content analysis of visual material, where sample sizes are generally far larger, which provides some of the best opportunities for exploring structural categories such as gender, age or race. Accordingly we begin our discussion by looking at studies which exemplify this methodological approach.

Investigating 2D visual material: quantitative considerations

One of the principal advantages of the quantitative analysis of documentary visual material is arguably the historical depth to an inquiry which is possible. Jane Richardson and A. L. Kroeber's (1940) investigation of changes in women's dress over a period of three centuries has consequently become something of a classic in the quantitative tradition. No one would dispute that women's formal dress fashions have altered over the centuries. Skirt length and width, waist position, depth of décolletage, and so on, have all undergone changes; these sorts of movements are precisely what we mean by the idea of fashion. However, it is not at all obvious to think of fashion changes as following an identifiable historical sequence. Richardson and Kroeber set out to investigate this proposition using visual materials: pictures or images of women attired in formal dress over a period of some 332 years between 1605 and 1936. To these images they applied standard content analysis procedures, only in their case the content was visual and the information collected took the form of a standardized series of precise measurements of the various dimensions of the clothing.

Working at a time long before the arrival of online digital archives, Richardson and Kroeber had to exercise considerable ingenuity in obtaining the required visual materials. One of their primary sources was the various European fashion magazines and journals – *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Ladies National Magazine*, *Galerie des Modes* – and these provided the period between 1787 and 1936 with the most complete record. Prior to this their collection of images had to be drawn from more irregular sources: engravings, lithographs, as well as the works of some of the leading contemporary artists and painters (e.g. Velasquez, Van Dyck, Reynolds, Hogarth). In this way they were able to assemble a more or less continuous record of a changing fashion style, which is something governed by aesthetic considerations alone given that the design of evening dress has no apparent 'utilitarian motivation'. Contemporary quantitative researchers might question their reliance on these data sources but this would be mistaken given the thrust of Richardson and Kroeber's inquiry. After all, painters and engravers were the image makers of their day in exactly the same way that photographers are now. While they may have

represented their subjects in stylized or conventionalized poses there is no reason to assume that they did not faithfully record the dimensions of their clothing.

Thirty-six years after their research was published Dwight Robinson (1976) undertook a similar quantitative investigation of changing fashion, this time looking at the variations in men's growth of facial hair. Robinson modelled his inquiry with explicit reference to the earlier study and, indeed, found some striking similarities between them. For his data Robinson used photographs of men who appeared in the *Illustrated London News* over a 130-year period (1842–1972). The images were coded to identify various forms and combinations of facial hair: sideburns, sideburns and moustaches, beards, moustaches alone and clean shavenness. Robinson noted that the men who appeared in the *Illustrated London News* would have been members of the social and cultural elite and so his findings were not necessarily generalizable to all sections of (British) society. However, a compensating advantage was that the sample he obtained would have been very similar in terms of occupation, social status, income and age.

As is common with virtually all quantitative investigations of visual material, none of these authors include examples of the images which served as their respective databases. Glancing through their articles, it would be impossible to tell that they were based on the analysis of visual materials. Each presents the results of their research in the form of summary statistical tables and time-series figures which show how the various fashions have changed. Richardson and Kroeber found that the basic dimensions of European female dress 'alternate with fair regularity between maxima and minima which in most cases average about fifty years apart, so that the full wave-length of their periodicity is around a century' (1940: 148). Robinson found that men's facial hair changes underwent similar cyclical changes and observed a 'remarkable correspondence' between the width of skirt wave reported by Richardson and Kroeber and his own finding concerning the frequency of beards. The two time-series measurements are shown in Figure 4.1.

When seen in this way, the changes in fashion appear as eminently Durkheimian social facts rather than as the product of individual whim. Richardson and Kroeber in fact compare the cyclical changes in fashion with long-term economic trends. Both of these exhibit a 'stateliness of march' in which 'as far as individuals are concerned, the total situation seems overwhelmingly to indicate that their actions are determined by the style far more than they can determine it' (Richardson and Kroeber, 1940: 149). Finally they speculate that these changes in fashion may be linked to the incidence of some underlying cultural instability. During the three centuries they investigated, European women's dress could be seen as tending towards a particular ideal, one characterized by amplitude in most dimensions and scantiness in others. As these proportions are achieved, a period of equilibrium, stability or low variability sets in. However, at other times these proportions are at the

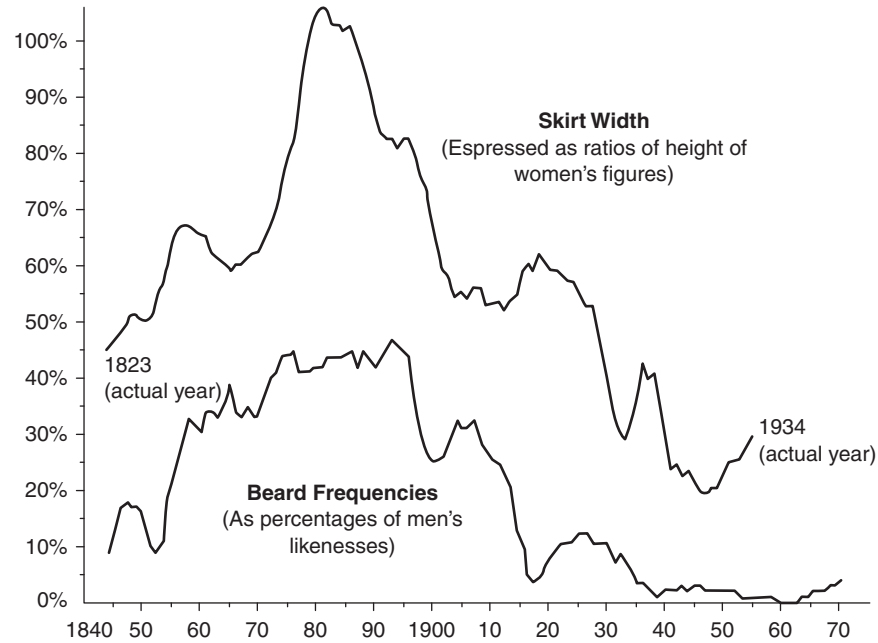


Figure 4.1 *Time series graph comparing width of skirts in images of women (1823–1934) and prevalence of beards in photographs of men (1844–1955), in five-year moving averages*

Source: Robinson (1976: 1137)

opposite extreme and there is an increase in their variability. What is intriguing is that these periods of high variability also appear to coincide with periods of general social and political instability – for example, the Revolutionary Napoleonic and First World War eras. Richardson and Kroeber are at pains to point out that they are not suggesting that these periods of socio-cultural instability directly caused the particular dress styles they observed but rather that they disrupted the established fashions thereby launching them on a trajectory towards an eventual new equilibrium based on opposing dimensions.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can draw from Robinson's and Richardson and Kroeber's inquiries is the recognition that visual material can be subject to rigorous quantification as long as the coding categories that a researcher employs are transposable across the entire corpus of data which is collected. In both of these studies coding categories – aspects of the body or clothing to be measured or noted – were selected which fulfilled this criterion. A second lesson concerns the advantages of obtaining time-series data in an investigation. While it may not be essential to cover historical periods as extensive as these, the kinds of social changes which can be investigated in this way may only become apparent when data are collected over a relatively long period of time. Nevertheless, despite their exemplary use of historical visual records

both studies are atypical in that they are concerned quite literally with 'surface' or epiphenomenal considerations (dresses, skirts and facial hair) rather than core demographic information (gender, age, race and ethnicity) which has generally been of concern to contemporary researchers seeking to utilize visual material for quantitative ends. None of the researchers had any interest in the variability of these categories in the people whose images they observed. Indeed, had a complete record been available Richardson and Kroeber could just have easily employed images of mannequins.

A number of contemporary researchers have taken inspiration from these earlier studies and carried out important studies using visual material in this quantitative way. As noted above, the recent studies have focused on more mainstream sociological categories but they have approached this from a variety of disciplinary angles. Working within a communications framework, Victoria Alexander (1994) examined the representation of children in magazine advertisements over the course of the twentieth century. Alexander's interest was in discovering whether these images offered any clues about changing societal assumptions about the importance of children as well as corresponding ideologies of childrearing practice. For example, she suggests the advertisements may provide evidence for the linear trend that children have come to be viewed more as 'priceless love objects' rather than 'economic contributors'. In relation to childrearing she notes that there has been something of an oscillation between restrictive regimes on the one hand (the Holt method) and practices encouraging leniency and permissiveness on the other (Dr Spock). A number of hypotheses based on these initial conjectures were developed and found to be broadly confirmed in her investigation of the advertisements which featured children in the general audience magazines which she analysed.

Alexander's method of sampling visual materials and looking for change over time is a core technique in visual research as it helps the researcher to isolate an 'independent variable' that is responsible for the shift. This adds theoretical interest to what might otherwise be a quite descriptive enterprise. We find something similar going on in a study of anti-alcohol posters in Poland from 1945 to 1989 (Gorsky et al., 2010). In Poland after the Second World War alcoholism was a major social problem. For many, cheap vodka was one of the few pleasures in life. Stylish posters by leading graphic artists were part of a government campaign to control drinking. In the research project the team located and viewed 213 posters held in museums, archives and libraries. They then coded them thematically according to whether they addressed the viewer as an individual, as a family member or as a part of the wider community (see discussion of subject positions, below). The results showed a relatively small proportion of posters presenting alcoholism as an individual 'medical' problem relating to addiction, but a large number illustrating its impacts on community life. For example, the poster might show a drunk who was 'failing to contribute to the economy' by shirking work

responsibilities, or highlight the tragedy of road accidents. The alcoholic was framed as a social deviant causing problems for society at large, not as a person undergoing a personal tragedy. The data showed this pattern was most pronounced prior to 1968. Gorsky et al. suggest this reflects the dominance of themes relating to the national reconstruction effort and a policy of 'yoking the health message to political imperatives'. In later periods the iron grip of Stalinism relaxed a little and posters became more thematically diverse. To some extent this also reflected the emergence or permissibility of new aesthetic codes other than socialist realism.

Although subjects such as the alcoholic offer fertile grounds for connecting visual sociology to the sociology of deviance, interest in deviants is far outstripped by concerns with race and ethnicity in visual quantitative research. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins' (1993) investigation of *National Geographic* magazine over a three-decade period in the second half of the twentieth century from a broadly critical, post-colonial studies perspective provides an example of an inquiry from the opposite end of the spectrum to the more dispassionate behaviourist approach taken by Richardson and Kroeber. Lutz and Collins saw their research as necessarily engaging with volatile issues of 'power, race and history' and their guiding research question as an inquiry into how the 'West' – in the institutional form of the respected magazine – has perceived and appropriated 'non-Western' others. But despite this critical stance informing their investigation they nevertheless found the quantitative rigour which the systematic use of content analysis procedures offers to be a valuable means of making their case. As part of their research Lutz and Collins obtained a random sample of nearly 600 photographs published in the magazine between 1950 and 1986. However, the sheer complexity of the images posed particular challenges. Both Richardson and Kroeber's and Robinson's studies were relatively straightforward in terms of the categories that each works with; in contrast Lutz and Collins devised 22 coding categories (see their Appendix A, p. 285) to record the information that the magazine's photographs contained. These covered issues such as the age and gender of the people depicted, the type of activity being undertaken and the level of technology utilized (e.g. simple hand tools or modern machinery), and the presence of Westerners in the photograph. It is important to stress that their book is not a work of visual anthropology or sociology like the studies by Bateson and Mead or Goffman examined in Chapter 3. Although examples of photographs are provided (approximately 40 out of the 600 examined) the book relies mostly on the authors' interpretation of the statistical summaries of the coded information.

One of their categories concerned the direction of the gaze of the principal subject of the photograph, and with regards to this they report the following:

> To a statistically significant degree, women look into the camera more than men, children and older people look into the camera more often than other adults, those who appear poor more than those who appear wealthy, those whose skin is very

> dark more than those who are bronze, those who are bronze more than those who are white, those in native dress more than those in Western garb, those without any tools more than those using machinery. Those who are culturally defined by the West as weak – women, children, people of colour, the poor, the tribal rather than the modern, those without technology – are more likely to face the camera, the more powerful to be represented looking elsewhere. (Lutz and Collins, 1993: 199)

To some extent this is counter-intuitive given the association between modesty and gaze aversion that can be observed in contemporary advertising images depicting women.[2] However, Lutz and Collins interpret this finding as evidence of an earlier convention that frontal portraits (which typically include a gaze towards the camera) were typically associated with the lower classes and consequently it was understood in Tagg's (1988: 37) phrase as 'a code of social inferiority'. Summarizing their multifaceted study is not easy but Lutz and Collins argue that the magazine helps perpetuate a number of themes which have appeared and reappeared over several centuries of contact between the West and non-West. These include the idea of the natural family of man, and of societies with little historical dynamism of their own but with a place on an evolutionary ladder which culminates in a modern Western lifestyle. In short, they suggest, the non-Western world portrayed by the *National Geographic* is that of 'happy, classless people outside of history but evolving into it, edged with exoticism and sexuality, but knowable to some degree as individuals' (1993: 116).

Race also features in a more recent quantitative study of visual material by Brent Berry (2006) but one which is concerned with a very different substantive issue. Berry, a demographer, seized on the idea of utilizing photographs of wedding parties for evidence of interracial friendships. His argument is that the persons who are chosen to act as best man, groomsmen and bridesmaids at these significant occasions are likely to be drawn from one's closest and most important friends. Consequently such wedding party images are likely to provide valuable data about racial segregation in close friendships which may well be superior to the variable results which he notes are typically evident in conventional survey research on this topic. Berry's data was obtained from websites specializing in hosting wedding photographs and so his study has some resonance with the research we consider in Chapter 8 which examines 'virtual visual data'. However, we feel it is appropriate to consider it here as it constitutes an innovative, unobtrusive way of using visual data in a quantitative way. His sample consisted of over 1100 wedding party photographs which were coded to record the racial origin – European, African, East and Southeast Asian and Other – of the participants. The photographs were then analysed for evidence of interracial friendship patterns and interpreted in the light of findings on friendship patterns obtained from earlier self-report studies. The detailed results of his inquiry are interpreted

[2]Goffman (1979) discusses this as one of the components of 'licensed withdrawal' in *Gender Advertisements.*

by him with the necessary caveats which such an innovative use of visual material requires (matters which are outside the scope of this chapter) but in summary the wedding party visual evidence suggests that survey estimates of interracial friendships may well overstate their actual preference, particularly with respect to the number of whites who report having close friendships with black persons. Berry found that only 3.7% of whites had black friends whom they deemed close enough to be included in their wedding party. However, the situation was asymmetric: blacks were much more likely to have a close white friend included in their wedding party with 22.2% of blacks having a white bridesmaid or groomsman. With regard to the relationships between these two categories and the other principal racial grouping, Berry found that East and Southeast Asians and whites are equally likely to be in each other's wedding party but East and Southeast Asians have black friends to their weddings only one-fifth of the rate at which they themselves are included at black weddings.

None of the inquiries we have examined so far are likely to be viewed as core examples of visual research but we conclude this section by looking at another study of racial images by one of the field's leading practitioners, John Grady, and published in its principal journal, *Visual Studies*. Grady's research (Grady, 2007) comprised a systematic investigation of advertisements appearing in *Life* magazine between 1936 and 2000 which contained images of black people. To an extent Grady's study parallels Berry's use of wedding photography for he sees the advertising images as a source of visual information about the changing state of race relations in the USA, but Grady seeks to go beyond the quantitative documentation of trends to unpack some of the 'narratives' which he suggests are also contained within the advertisements. In this sense, his article can be understood as a bridge between the quantitative tradition in visual research and the more interpretive qualitative approaches which we consider shortly. Grady has championed the quantitative use of visual material for some time and his article contains helpful tips on the selection of his sample (590 advertisements) and the coding procedures he adopted.[3] In addition he includes 28 advertising images taken from this larger sample with detailed analytical commentary on many of these. Grady's paper is also notable for the way in which he contextualizes his analysis of the visual data by weaving in the results from various US national surveys which have documented whites' attitudes on a variety of questions concerning racial integration. Summarizing the results of his analysis of the advertisements, Grady suggests that there are two distinct modes of depicting the relationship between blacks and

[3]For an additional useful overview of content analysis procedures by another leading visual researcher see Bell (2001). Bell illustrates the potential of this methodology through analysis of a number of media texts such as magazine covers and television news coverage during an election campaign.

whites. In the first, which runs from approximately 1936 to the early 1960s and which he labels the 'iconography of segregation', black people are predominantly shown as fulfilling white needs, occupying occupational roles such as porters, servants or cooks. In the second, which commences in the late 1960s and which he suggests is still evolving, an alternative 'iconography of integration' has taken the place of the earlier mode. The iconography of integration celebrates achievement and the enjoyment of the rewards of a consumer society. In these advertisements blacks do not have a social function which distinguishes them from whites; however, Grady suggests that the precise ways in which blacks are featured – for example, as 'anonymous everymen' or as 'exemplifying well-deserved success' – may not be without significance. As he puts it:

> If blacks have a function in these depictions … it is to exemplify that people can triumph over difficulty and adversity, share in the good life and still remind their fellows of the need for social responsibility … In the iconography of integration, therefore, blacks lend legitimacy to the good life produced by late-twentieth-century American capitalism while simultaneously offering a moral caution about what, and who, it neglects. (Grady, 2007: 228)

Quantitative analyses of visual data such as the ones we have been describing are generally outside the scope of an individual student project. However, they would be manageable if a number of students combined efforts, perhaps as part of an assignment for a methods class. As we have seen, the advantage of using visual data quantitatively is that much longer historical periods can be investigated using rigorous sampling techniques. We offer one suggestion for an exercise which draws upon ideas from these three case studies – others could be readily identified.

4.1 EXERCISE

Representations of Racial Relationships

Estimated time required: A simple comparison of different images based on the suggestions below could be done as an in-class exercise in 30–60 minutes. As a project, this exercise could be expanded into a more detailed project by choosing a number of different comparative sites, and also by comparing with demographic or other data available for the locations chosen. Allow more than 2 hours, increasing the time depending on the level of analysis required by the teacher.

(a) Following on from studies by Grady and others, consider how you too could analyse and comment on (inter)racial representations. One area which may

(Continued)

(Continued)

be of interest is considering the representations in new residential developments in cities. Many cities have inner urban areas undergoing gentrification, and which often attract the younger cosmopolitan crowds looking to live and work in close proximity. At the other extreme, there are often suburban developments on the outskirts of cities which appear more likely to target families or those without the means to live any closer. Would we expect any differences in the racial characteristics of people used to promote these different sorts of developments?

For example, in the Australian city where two of the authors live, there are currently a number of new residential projects being planned and promoted. Some are high-density inner city apartment developments; others are suburban planned communities at a considerable distance from the city centre. Both types of developments are being promoted primarily through websites and also the print media (advertising in weekend newspapers, promotional brochures, and so on). While we might have expected differences in the racial (and also age-related) make-up of the people featured in the advertising, we were instead surprised by the marked similarities between all of the projects. A quick overview of the images used suggested that the models were almost uniformly Caucasian and in their twenties or thirties. Couples featured most prominently. Variations were either of a Caucasian family with young children (never teenagers!), or apparently fit and good-looking older Caucasian couples. The only racial variation was in a web link for 'activities' in one suburban development, in which two young Asian children were featured in martial arts attire!

To make our exercise more meaningful, we could have compared our results with statistical or census data which gives a breakdown of different racial groupings in our city. Does the lack of variation in our images suggest an outdated stereotype, or is it possible that other factors are at play, such as trends in preferred housing options? (For instance, would non-Caucasians who live in our city be more likely to rent, or buy established houses in certain areas, rather than buy new ones?)

Do a similar exercise based on the city or area you live in. More in-depth projects should consider why, or why not, certain racial characteristics are featured more often than others.

(b) Another area of comparison which would be worthwhile is analysing workforce images. Find the websites of, say, five major companies in your area or state and analyse the images of people which they use to promote their company. What sort of racial patterns emerge? Many companies also include photographs of the company directors, senior managers or other senior staff. Compare these images and percentages of racial difference with the overall percentage of racial difference demonstrated on each website. What can you infer?

Qualitative approaches to 2D visual analysis

In the previous chapter we briefly outlined some of the most important developments in the interpretive traditions for the analysis of existing visual images. These approaches, which are less concerned with treating visual data as indicators of larger social and cultural processes and more with uncovering their possible hidden codes or messages, are clearly dominant in visual research circles. However, it would be a mistake to treat these qualitative approaches as undifferentiated for there are a number of important theoretical and conceptual styles on offer. In our discussion of these we will endeavour to weave together both theoretical and empirical considerations. After a brief outline of the concepts in the cultural studies approach, the discipline which is typically seen as having contributed most to this research effort, we then turn to consider a number of different types or forms in which 2D visual data are encountered. Some of these permit more detailed exploration of the cultural studies or semiotic approach but others have attracted the interest of scholars who approach visual information from very different angles.

Over recent decades the field of cultural studies has consolidated as the leading disciplinary home for scholars interested in the qualitative investigation of images. Cultural studies is something of a hybrid discipline and the concepts which it has developed for the analysis of images have come from fields as diverse as anthropology, sociology, psychology, film studies and literary criticism. A basic working knowledge of these is essential not only for thinking about images, but also for writing about them. The following paragraphs will give you an introduction to some key concepts, which are in **bold**. In published analyses these are often complemented by other vocabularies such as those of Marxism, feminism and queer theory.

Binary Oppositions – these are concepts or signifiers which are arranged in pairs but opposed to each other. Common examples are man:woman, light:dark, right:left. Often there is a hierarchy involved in the binary opposition. In each of the pairs above, for example, the first term tends to be valued more than the second. Binary oppositions can play a crucial role in shaping the ways we read an image and our emotional and intellectual responses to it. In the picture of the policeman being kicked (Figure 3.2, Chapter 3) the binary oppositions are between the policeman:protestor, victim:aggressor and law and order:mob. Oppositions such as these – and others – might be evident in media coverage of the 'Occupy Wall Street' global protests which we posed as a suggestion for a project in Chapter 3.

Frames – these are the contexts within which an image, or part of an image, is presented to the viewer. Because interpretation involves relationships between the part and the whole (the hermeneutic circle) these frames often

have an impact on how an image is read. Institutions like art galleries provide one kind of frame. As the inventors of the 'readymade' found, we see items such as chairs and wine racks differently once they are removed from everyday life and placed in such a context. Other kinds of frame are the cultural packages that help us to deploy conventions and common-sense understandings to decode a particular visual item. We will probably read the image of a naked female body one way if we encounter it in a pornographic magazine and another way if it is in a book of lesbian–feminist photography. This example points to the close links between 'frames' and 'genre' (see below). Text can also be used to frame or 'anchor' the meaning of an image.

Genre – this refers to the categories that we use to classify cultural objects into groups with similar properties or themes. We can think of genres such as 'news photography', 'sports photography', 'fashion photography'. We can also think of genres in terms of the mood, style or narrative they convey. We can think of 'heroic', 'romantic' and 'comic' images and of 'humanist', 'documentary' and 'dramatic' photography. Each genre tends to be driven by its own codes and conventions. Understanding these can provide a clue to interpreting individual images.

Identification – This refers to the ways in which people 'relate to' a particular image. Just as we tend to relate to the hero or heroine of a novel as we read it, so we can identify with a particular person or group of people in an image. Subject positions often play a major role in this process. Many successful (and ideologically powerful) images work by establishing identification between viewer and those depicted in the photograph. In the picture of a policeman being kicked (Figure 3.2, Chapter 3) the reader identifying with the police officer will be more likely to oppose the demonstrators and their cause.

Narrative – this involves a storyline. This can be achieved through a series of images (e.g. a comic strip, photographs arranged chronologically in an album) or else can be projected onto a single image (see discussion of the UniSafe poster below by imagining what has happened in the past and, perhaps, what is going to happen next).

Reading – this is the process of decoding the image. While this may seem straightforward, the ability to correctly read some kinds of images (such as religious art) can take years of socialization. It is important to recognize the massive role that common sense plays in readings of images in everyday life. Advertisements often play on this, by providing subtle clues that people have to use to figure out what is going on. Sociological research into 'media effects' suggests that people may read the same image in divergent ways, often depending on their identity, life experiences and the subject

positions they adopt. While there may be a **preferred** or **dominant** or **hegemonic** reading which is intended by the author or reinforces a prevailing ideology, **oppositional readings** can be made of the same text. These might contest the dominant meanings of the image. **Divergent readings** differ from oppositional readings in that they may not confront the dominant reading in a direct political way. Instead they might 'miss the point' of the image.

Denotation – this refers to the obvious, literal or common-sense meaning of a sign or image. It is sometimes referred to as 'the first level of signification'.

Connotation – this refers to the more complex ideological or mythical themes that occur when denotation interacts with dominant cultural values. This is also known as the second level of signification. In Barthes' famous example of the front cover of a copy of *Paris Match* what is denotated is a young black soldier saluting, his gaze apparently fixed on the (unseen) French national flag, but what is connotated is the suggestion that France is a great empire loyally served by all her citizens regardless of race or ethnicity.

Signifier/Signified – these terms refer to the sign and its referent. These can take various forms. One common typology was provided by Charles Peirce, a founding figure in the study of semiotics. An **iconic** representation is one motivated by direct resemblance. An icon is usually a copy of the real object, such as a photograph of a person or a model of the Eiffel Tower. An **index** has a direct connection with the thing it represents. This often involves **synecdoche**, where a part of something stands for the whole. The Eiffel Tower, for example, might be used to symbolize 'Paris', or a smile to represent happiness or holding hands to represent being emotionally connected. A **symbol** has a link to its referent that is purely arbitrary and a matter of cultural convention. A red rose, for example, symbolizes love or passion. Most photographs are icons in that they are scaled down, 2D copies of reality. They may, however, involve other kinds of signification and so become quite complex to interpret. Imagine a photograph showing two people sitting on a bench in a park holding hands. One is holding a model of the Eiffel Tower and the other a bunch of red roses. As this is a picture of a real scene that really happened (even if with models), the photograph is an icon of people sitting on a bench holding hands. However, there is more going on. The icon of the Eiffel tower operates as an index of Paris. The smile operates as an index of happiness. The roses operate as a symbol of love. Putting these together we can quickly build up an interpretation. The two people are a couple (the hands), they are in Paris (the model Eiffel Tower), they are in love (the flowers) and very happy about it all (the smile). Such an image might be found in a tourist brochure promoting Paris as a romantic holiday destination, or perhaps in the couple's honeymoon photo album.

Subject Position – this is, roughly speaking, the identity that is invoked in a particular image. In an image of a woman with a child, the subject position of 'mother' is probably central to interpreting the role at work in the image. If the same woman is positioned at a boardroom meeting, we might think of her as occupying the subject position of 'executive'. Determining the subject positions at play in a picture is often central to interpreting its meaning. Screen theory also speaks of the importance of subject positions for the reader of the image. Images do this by influencing the kind of **gaze** that is used. We might read a given image in different ways according to which of our identities (gender, race, age, occupation, etc.) we foreground. Some images try to provide a subject position for us, although it may not be one we adopt. Robert Doisneau's well-known photograph of lovers kissing situates the viewer as the non-gendered occupant of a Parisian pavement café. This gives us a status as participants in the scene rather than voyeurs and allows us to imaginatively project ourselves into another time and place.

The poster as 2D visual data: the UniSafe campaign

We can apply these concepts to an in-depth analysis of a poster designed to publicize safety awareness at the university at which all three of us have worked for some time during our careers: The University of Queensland, located in Brisbane, the Queensland state capital. The poster was one of a larger series which was developed as the first initiative of the university's safety committee and they were prominently displayed for several years throughout the campus. The poster we have chosen to examine is featured in Figure 4.2.

The picture's presentation as a poster (as opposed to being an image in a book or photo album) provides a **frame** which tells us that public information is contained in the image. We can then read the picture for that information. The accompanying text and UniSafe logo are also important frames. By highlighting issues of threat and safety they work to eliminate other potential readings of the picture (e.g. the people have turned round to greet a friend who is running after them) and foreground a message about danger on campus. This reading is facilitated by our knowledge that the poster is in the wider **genre** of posters and billboards that convey messages about public health and safety. We know, for example, that we are not supposed to be reading the image for aesthetic pleasure or as a commercial advertisement. There seem to be four **subject positions** involved in the picture. There is that of the UniSafe escort (guardian), that of male student, female student and that of the person they are looking at. The UniSafe poster attempts to position the viewer in this fourth subject position but this – inadvertently – is that of potential stalker. This creates an implied **binary opposition** between the

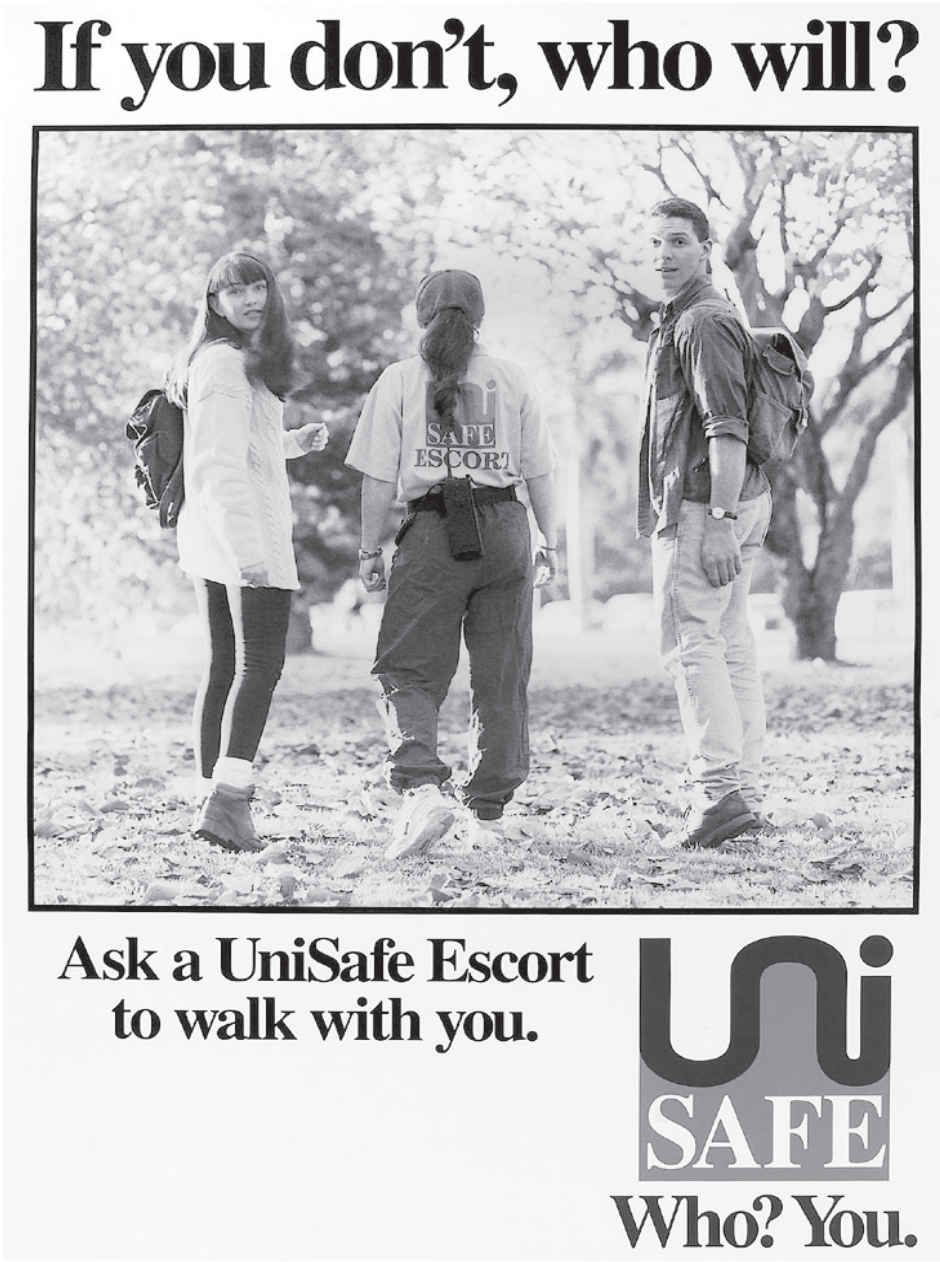


Figure 4.2 *'UniSafe' advertising poster. 'Ask a UniSafe escort to walk with you'* (photo courtesy University of Queensland)

'good citizens' and 'evil people'. The tension between this subject position and our real status as law-abiding persons causes us to reflect on our vulnerability and creates unease. By occupying this position, if only for a split second, we take on the **gaze** of the predator. In other respects the poster is

remarkably free of typical binary oppositions. The male and female students, for example, are depicted in a way which de-emphasizes sexual difference. This possibly reflects the values of the liberal campus audience for whom it is intended. The poster contains a strong **narrative** element which, in the **preferred reading**, runs something like as follows. The people have been walking across campus. They have been stalked. There has been a noise, maybe a sudden cough or the sound of a twig breaking. They have just turned round in alarm, but the UniSafe escort stays cool. They are safe. Various **signifiers** are at work in the picture to try to anchor the image. The casual clothing and backpacks are **indexes** of a broader student status and lifestyle. They mark out the two people facing the camera as 'ordinary'. The grass and leafy trees suggest this is a typical suburban or rural campus. These signifiers help the viewer (presumably also a student) to **identify** with the people in the photograph. The expressions on their faces are an index of an emotional state – they have been startled and are alarmed. The UniSafe escort appears athletic. Her radio, track pants and sneakers are also indexes. They mark her out as a person who is in continual contact with the authorities and ready for action. Finally the seamless logo combines Uni and Safe in a way that mutually enfolds. This carries an implicit image of caring and sharing rather than a militaristic ethos.

Considerable common-sense knowledge is required to make this **preferred reading** of the image. We need to draw upon a pre-existing understanding of the danger of predatory assault, the nature of UniSafe and how to contact it (the poster does not provide these details), the conventions of clothing and facial expression, the conventions of the poster format, etc., in order to work out what the poster is about. The poster might be criticized on the grounds that it is too ambiguous and allows **divergent readings** to be made. Certainly this might be the case for new, non-English-speaking students who might lack the cultural knowledge required to understand the poster. We asked a cross-section of people about the poster, and many said that they were not quite certain what it was all about. Gay men might read the man in the UniSafe poster as homosexual and identify with him as a potential victim of homophobic violence. Such a reading would be consistent with the **preferred reading** but is unlikely to occur to heterosexual males. Having never felt threatened by the prospect of such violence, they may be puzzled at the presence of a man in the picture and wonder why he feels the need to be protected by a woman who is smaller than himself. The grassy, well-lit setting may be interpreted as being pastoral. This may lead to the viewer missing the cues about danger. There is little sense of threat in this environment. The facial expressions of the students are ambiguous. They may be indicating surprise rather than fear, as if they have been startled by a friend who is running after them. Over the years we have discussed the posters in our classes with students. One expressed concern that the students depicted had turned round but not the UniSafe escort: 'It suggests they are incompetent.

The students have heard footsteps, but the escort is oblivious to the danger.' Finally the accompanying text can be read in various ways. 'If you don't, who will?' and 'Who? You' are shorthand for something – but what? If the viewer gets the preferred reading he or she might flesh these out as: 'If you don't use

Figure 4.3 *'UniSafe' advertising poster. 'Play smart. One drink too many could make you vulnerable'* (photo courtesy University of Queensland)

Figure 4.4 *'UniSafe' advertising poster. 'Report anything suspicious'* (photo courtesy University of Queensland)

a UniSafe escort, then what kind of dangerous character might take advantage of you?' and 'Who is in danger? I am.' But other readings are possible. Some students have suggested it could be a recruiting poster for UniSafe. Their reading appears to be: 'If you don't volunteer to be a UniSafe escort, then who will do the job?' and 'Who should be a UniSafe escort? I should.'

Strongly oppositional readings of the text are also possible. When asked to talk about the poster, one male student's first response was to point to the UniSafe escort and comment along the lines: 'She looks attractive, but perhaps she's a lesbian. She's got some kind of uniform and is in a position of authority. They like that sort of thing.' Here the poster was read as a gallery of physical appeal and deviant sexuality. An **oppositional reading** had been made by taking a progressive image and reading it using a conservative and sexist gaze. Another person started laughing when shown the poster suggesting – we think tongue-in-cheek – that it could be mistaken for an advertisement for a safe-sex brothel. The unintended triggers here were the words 'escort' and 'safe' and the photo showing young women. This could be seen as an example of a **divergent reading**, one which applies a completely different frame to the poster.

The ability of an image to be read in such divergent ways means we have to be cautious in assuming images have fixed meanings or ideological effects just because we 'experts' are able to read these into them. Many images will mean different things to different people. Finding out why can tell us a lot about the ways in which images generate meanings in our society.

4.2 EXERCISE

Reading Posters

Estimated time required: As an in-class exercise, 30–60 minutes. As a project, this exercise could be expanded into a more detailed project if students are asked to prepare more thorough written analyses, including a consideration of the responses of other people.

Examine the other UniSafe posters (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Write about them in a similar way to the example above. Try to explain the message of each picture and how it 'works' or does not work to achieve its goal. Note also the ways that the interaction between the text and the image changes according to the reading you make. When you have finished this activity, ask various people to explain each poster to you. Did they make the same readings as you? Why/Why not? Do you notice any patterns in the responses that might be explained by gender, age or some other demographic characteristic?

Cartoons

Photographs, advertisements and posters have received the lion's share of attention from visual scholars but their visual 'poor cousins' – such as cartoons and comic strips – have been largely neglected. The relative lack of attention paid to cartoons as media texts is unfortunate given that the historical record that is available in relation to cartoons can sometimes be more

complete than for photographs. Many important magazines of social and political commentary founded in the nineteenth century (e.g. *Punch* in the UK, *The Bulletin* in Australia) relied on cartooning as their preferred visual medium well into the twentieth century. As we shall see shortly, the cartoon record available in these publications provides a rich seam for investigation for visual research. A second reason why visual researchers should take more interest in cartoons is that they are arguably images which readers pay more attention to than other media visual material such as advertisements. Generally speaking, people do not purchase a newspaper to read the advertising but the daily editorial cartoon is invariably one of the first things to be noted.

In part, this academic neglect of cartoons stems from their non-realist character when compared with the more overtly factual newspaper photograph or the commercially driven advertising image. Despite their ubiquity – or perhaps because of it – they have been largely passed over by both media scholars and the mainstream sociological community alike and it takes a controversial event such as the publication of 12 cartoon caricatures of the prophet Muhammad by a Danish newspaper, the *Jyllands-Posten*, in 2005 for them to be noticed. This incident led to global protests, several countries withdrawing their ambassadors from Denmark, death threats to some of the cartoonists responsible and an ongoing debate about the relations between the West and Islam and the wider implications for press freedom (e.g. Muller and Özcan, 2007; Weaver, 2010).

Social science interest in cartoons, while limited, has traditionally focused on a number of recurring themes. The early literature in which cartoons have been explored as sites of stereotyping, overt racism or ideology (Alba, 1966; Coupe, 1966; Streicher, 1966; Nir, 1977; Walker, 1978) suggests that the *Jyllands-Posten* incident is not without precedent. However, the predominant focus of most recent research has been to engage with the common-sense view of the cartoon as a vehicle for humour or satire. Much of this has come from scholars from political science or public administration backgrounds and debate has centred on whether cartoons help shape public opinion concerning politicians or government policies or else alternatively reflect sentiments which are already culturally established. The election of Barack Obama as the first African–American President of the USA, as well as the prominent part played by several women in the 2008 presidential primaries, has meant that cartoon depictions of race and gender have received particular attention from political scientists (Conners, 2010; Edwards and Austin McDonald, 2010). Although this literature does at times shed light on its own disciplinary concerns it has little interest in exploring the wider uses to which visual information, in the form of cartoons, can be put. For example, Edwards and Austin McDonald (2010) basically restrict their investigation to the extent to which the metaphorical imagery of the female politician, elsewhere established as 'the pioneer', 'the puppet', 'the hostess-beauty queen' and the 'unruly woman', was applicable to the cartoon representations

of Sarah Palin and Hilary Clinton. While they make some interesting observations on the cartoon depictions there is no attempt at outlining a more general framework for the investigation of such images.

The most useful recent work on the sociological significance of cartoons has, arguably, come from researchers with backgrounds in fields other than politics. An example is provided by sociologist Erik Cohen who has recently extended his long-standing interest in tourism to the topic of tourism cartoons. Drawing upon the entries for an International Tourism Cartoon Competition, hosted by a number of Turkish educational and cultural organizations, Cohen (2011) suggests that there are four principal elements which need to be considered in the analysis of any cartoon. He refers to these as:

1 **The *dramatis personae***. This refers to the basic demographic characteristics of the people (in his case tourists and others) who are depicted in the cartoons.
2 **The plot.** Cartoons typically allude to a temporal dimension and the plot refers to the way in which the *dramatis personae* are framed in a single image which is understandable as part of an ongoing event.
3 **The point.** This refers to the manner in which the humorous intent of the cartoon is created. Scholars of humour have typically seen verbal humour as lying in some textual incongruity. Cohen suggests that the majority of cartoons should have a similar visual incongruity.
4 **The target.** In editorial newspaper cartoons the target refers to the person (most typically a politician) or government policy which the cartoon seeks to satirize, ridicule or mock. Cohen suggests that tourist cartoons have similar targets – tourists themselves, the tourism system or even the wider symbolic meanings we now associate with travel and the tourist experience.

With regard to the specific entries for the tourism cartoon competition, although this attracted entries from cartoonists from 50 countries, Cohen found that overwhelmingly the tourists were depicted as 'Westerners'. There were a few Asians, principally Japanese, but only one cartoon featured an African as a tourist. The figure of the tourist in the cartoons is, thus, that of a Western (international) tourist. More detailed analysis of the images revealed that the tourist was predominantly male and middle aged. If other humans were shown then these were invariably drawn from the tourism industry such as guides, service workers or entertainers.

If the cartoons overwhelmingly depict middle-aged mass tourists engaged in routine sightseeing activities then how is their humorous intent generated? Cohen's answer is that these ordinary people are 'incongruously emplotted in a huge variety of extraordinary absurd, imaginary, improbable or exaggerated situations' (2011: 336). We would argue that such incongruity is a generic characteristic of almost all cartoons but that the form it assumes may well depend on features which are specific to the activity being depicted. For example, Cohen points out that the humour in tourist cartoons often invokes themes which have been identified in the academic literature on tourism, such as 'staged authenticity' (MacCannell, 1973; Chhabra et al., 2003), the

tourist obsession with photography (Larsen, 2005), eco-tourism (Elsrud, 2001; Ryan and Stewart, 2009) or the fascination with sites of historical death or 'dark tourism' (Osbaldiston and Petray, 2011). Several of the cartoons he includes in his article show gullible tourists in search of authenticity being duped by unscrupulous businessmen or entrepreneurs. Another depicts a group of tourists happily snapping away at a huge replica of the Trojan horse completely unaware that in their midst is a 'tourist' centaur engaged in the same activity. Cohen concludes his investigation by suggesting that the visual depictions of tourists in the cartoons may yield insights that could be explored in the academic literature on the subject. For example, the scenarios in which tourists are textually imagined as facing difficulties, challenges, or as lacking agency in the face of misfortunes, might provide clues to the phenomenon of 'failed tourism' or the ways in which tourists in real life deal with emergencies or unexpected situations.

A similar attempt to locate the potential of cartoons for a wider sociological discourse can be observed in a study of the representation of gambling in Finnish editorial cartoons (Raento and Meuronen, 2011). Drawing on a sample of 170 cartoons from the Finnish print media appearing between 1961 and 2005, Raento and Meuronen suggest that the cartoons offer unique insights into Finnish gambling culture and the role of gambling in society more generally. They argue that gambling research could well profit from the use of such popular cultural visual data. Among other things, such data may well facilitate comparative studies across national boundaries and help open up the 'insular field' of gambling studies to a broader range of scholars and disciplines.

4.3 PROJECT

Cartoons and Occupational Categories

Estimated time required: 2+ hours.

Tourists and gamblers (and, of course, politicians) are not the only social types to feature in cartoons. Many occupational groups have been similarly depicted – for example, health professionals (doctors, psychiatrists, nurses, veterinary surgeons), scientists, the armed services, and so on.

Visit one of the online cartoon databases (e.g. cartoonstock.com, cagle.com) and search for cartoons which feature one of these occupational groups. A sample of 20–30 should be sufficient.

Does the framework suggested by Cohen for his analysis of the tourist cartoons appear applicable to the ones you have found?

Consider to what extent the cartoon representations draw upon existing sociological knowledge of the occupational category or alternatively – as Cohen found – highlight different phenomena which could serve as the basis for further research.

The research by Cohen and Raento and Meuronen suggests that cartoons not only are vehicles for the dissemination of humour, but can also offer sociological insights into the phenomena which form their subject matter. We want to explore this in more depth by suggesting that cartoons can provide an intriguing resource for obtaining insights into the ways in which societies understand their economic and political processes. Economics and politics are without doubt the two spheres of social life which constitute the focus of cartoonists' attention and the manner in which these spheres have been historically portrayed offers us important clues to the nature of the structural relations within these spheres, which are not always articulated through other discursive forms. In short, one of the most informative ways of charting the changes in our thinking about what the economy entails – the prevailing canons of state economic policy and practice, the transparency of class relations within the economic domain, etc. – is to examine cartoon representations of the economy.

In Figures 4.5 and 4.6 we present two examples of economic/political cartooning – one from Australia and one from the UK – which both appeared during the global financial crisis which commenced in late 2007 and whose effects still linger on in many countries.

We have selected these two images in part because they are so similar (although we do not wish to imply that cartoonists are unimaginative and copy from each other's work). Our point is rather to suggest that each is a vivid

Figure 4.5 *Cartoon representation of 'the economy' by Bill Leak, published in The Australian, 2007* (courtesy of Bill Leak)

Figure 4.6 *Cartoon representation of 'the economy' by Dave Brown, published in the* Independent*, 2008* (courtesy of Dave Brown)

example of the various elements (e.g. Cohen's *dramatis personae*, plot, point, etc.) which have become the canonical themes in this particular genre of cartoon practice. They are nevertheless themes which are historically specific and it is possible to chart the emergence of these conventions reasonably precisely.

The three themes are as follows:

1 The representation of the economy or the economic system as an entity – in this case as a shipwrecked vessel.
2 The presence of the state or government, metonymically personified by the prime ministers of the two countries and other senior cabinet ministers. In Figure 4.5 *The Australian*'s Bill Leak has depicted the then Treasurer, Peter Costello, in a futile effort to steer the sunken 'HMAS Economy' while the Prime Minister John Howard offers fatuous encouragement. In Figure 4.6 the *Independent*'s Dave Brown shows the then UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, engaged in an equally futile effort to 'bail out' the wrecked economy using the top of Chancellor Alistair Darling's skull. Brown's cartoon is also a wry commentary on the efficacy of the government's policy of 'bailing out' the banks, which are represented in the cartoon by the three 'fat cats'.
3 The way the cartoon 'works' or generates its humour is through the opening up of positions of relative epistemological advantage. That is, the cartoonist and the reader are shown as having access to a more privileged view of the condition of the economy which the principal actors in the cartoon – the various politicians – do not enjoy. The government is thereby shown to be incompetent as an economic manager, because of its inability to realize or grasp the true economic situation.

These three elements have become virtually the standard form for contemporary 'economic cartoons'. The point to stress, though, is that this particular

set of conventions is a fairly recent development. In other historical periods quite different systems of representation were utilized and it is possible to chart the way in which the 'thing-like' economy at the 'mercy' of the government emerged. In doing this we want to focus on two core issues:

1 The manner in which the idea of the 'aggregate economy' emerges as a thing as opposed to the older idea of economizing and the way in which the state is implicated as the principal actor for the management of economic affairs.
2 The way in which the cartoons utilize a series of core oppositions to generate their meanings.

Economic cartoons utilize a set of binary oppositions and it is the variations in how these oppositions are collocated or combined which allows us to identify changes in economic thinking. The most important oppositions that can be found are as follows:

nature : civilization

brute forces : domestic order

lack of control : excessive intervention

role of market forces : role of government

health and prosperity : sickness and disease

realism : non-realism

perspective of cartoonist : perspective of the actor

Previous research (Emmison, 1986; Emmison and McHoul, 1987) has suggested that there have been at least two distinct phases in the way in which the economic process has been represented historically through cartoons. These phases also extend to the appropriation of metaphors for describing economic life. In the first phase, which lasts up to approximately 1940, the idea of 'the economy' as an aggregate entity did not exist either linguistically or visually. Prior to the emergence of the 'thing-like' or aggregated economy, the idea of 'economy' was instead confined to the notion of wise or prudent expenditure: economizing. In its most politicized version this practice was underpinned by supposed immutable laws of supply and demand, which economic subjects ignored at their peril. These conventionalized understandings are vividly captured in two cartoons from the UK periodical *Punch* from the 1920s (Figures 4.7 and 4.8) .

In Bernard Partridge's cartoon 'Up Against It' from 1921, we see these market forces anthropomorphized into the prize-fighter 'Economic Law' ready to step in on capital's behalf should this be necessary.

This is a manifestly partisan image and Partridge is clearly on the side of the bosses in their struggle with the workforce over wages and conditions.

Figure 4.7 *'Up Against It', cartoon by Bernard Partridge from* Punch *1921*

However, the point we seek to make here is that this image contrasts sharply with contemporary conservative political discourse which frames such wage demands in terms of their negative impact on 'the economy'. Put simply, the idea of 'the economy' had not yet evolved and it was to be several more decades before it was able to be depicted.

The word 'economy' of course existed but this referred to something different – not a thing but more of a process, in essence the process of economizing or making expenditure cuts. This can be observed in the second of the *Punch* cartoons we consider, this time from 1926, namely Lionel Raven-Hill's 'A

Large Order' (Figure 4.8). In this image a somewhat diminutive Winston Churchill, who was serving at the time as the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, is shown carrying an axe – labelled 'economy' – and being upbraided by John Bull for his failure to make much impact on the large and unruly tree of 'excessive expenditure'. Like the Partridge cartoon five years earlier, Raven-Hill is making a transparent comment on a current economic matter and while

Figure 4.8 *'A Large Order', cartoon by Lionel Raven-Hill from* Punch *1926*

Figure 4.9 *'Blossom Time', cartoon by Norman Mansbridge from* Punch *1963*

they both rely on metaphorical elements to achieve their messages, there is no attempt to establish a more privileged point of view. The scene which is depicted is shared by the cartoonist, the reader and the actors alike. Note also the way that Raven-Hill draws on 'intertextual' knowledge – the legend of the young George Washington confessing to cutting down the cherry tree – to frame his cartoon.

The idea that governments should concentrate on expenditure cuts and leave the marketplace to determine wage disputes was to change with the Keynesian revolution in economic thinking in the late 1930s. From this

point on, the idea of an aggregated economic structure and the crucial role which the state should play within this totality of forces and processes became the new focus of economic theory, a situation which was eventually translated into new forms of cartoon representation. It is not the case that Keynes 'discovered' the economy, but rather that he gave the term 'economy' a new and decisive meaning. To facilitate the idea that there was a national economic structure that was capable of being, and indeed should be, modified by government action, he began to refer to '*the* economy' as a totality, as something more than the combined activity of the individual economic units.

This change in economic thinking is elegantly illustrated by a third cartoon from *Punch*, Norman Mansbridge's 'Blossom Time', which appeared in April 1963 (Figure 4.9). This cartoon also features a tree and a Chancellor of the Exchequer but the contrast with Figure 4.8 is stunning. In Mansbridge's cartoon it is now the tree which has become 'the economy' and the Chancellor, Reginald Maudling, is depicted as a rotund spring fairy magically bringing new growth. But now there is a clear attempt to generate humour through the opening up of a position of epistemological advantage. The cartoonist and viewer can both see that this new growth will be short-lived for the tree's roots are infested with harmful pests and grubs but Maudling appears blithely unaware of this fact.

4.4 PROJECT

Cartoon Images of the Global Financial Crisis

Estimated time required: 2+ hours. Allow sufficient time for finding and choosing the cartoons prior to analysis.

Visit the online cartoon databases referred to in the previous project and search for cartoons depicting the economy which appeared between the years 2008 and 2010, the period when the global financial crisis (GFC) was most severe. Ensure that your sample covers cartoons from the major world regions – for example, Europe, North America, Asia, Australasia. It may be possible to refine this down to specific countries.

Undertake an elementary analysis of the content using the categories in Cohen's framework. Which of the *dramatis personae* (e.g. governments, banking industry, other financial institutions, etc.) is depicted as primarily responsible for causing the economic crisis? Does this vary from region to region? Which of the 'binary oppositions' are most evident in the cartoons? Can you detect any new oppositions?

Note: An additional useful background resource for this project is: Liliana Bounegru and Charles Forceville (2011) 'Metaphors in editorial cartoons: representing the global financial crisis', *Visual Communication*, 10 (2): 209–229.

Ethnomethodological approaches to 2D visual data: direction signs, maps

If cartoons can tell us a great deal about how we think about economic processes, then it is also the case that other forms of visual material – or more specifically the way we use or interpret this material – can tell us a lot about our common-sense, communicative abilities we rely on to navigate through everyday life. In this final section we want to look at some of the ways in which researchers in the ethnomethodological tradition have gone about the analysis of visual data. The ethnomethodological perspective has a 'natural affinity' for the visual for at its heart is a concern for the ways in which members of society act in such a way as to produce a 'witnessable social order' (Livingstone, 2008). That is, argue ethnomethodologists, people do things in such a way as to make whatever it is they are doing observable or analysable by others. As Garfinkel, the founder of ethnomethodology, put it in his inimitable prose style:

> Ethnomethodological studies analyse everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical purposes. (1967: vii)

Ethnomethodology thus has a commitment to studying the actual details of social practices and to this end it insists on the collection of naturally occurring data. Ethnomethodology has been aptly described by one of its earliest and most influential exponents as 'the study of the common-sense reasoning skills and abilities through which ordinary members of a culture produce and recognise intelligible courses of action' (Heritage, 1989: 21). A great deal of recent research in the ethnomethodological tradition has been concerned with the ways people use these abilities within technologically infused workplace settings, which typically entail the participants communicating via computers, and we have briefly touched on this in our discussion of the use of video technology in Chapter 3. We also return to the theme of the visibility of social arrangements in Chapter 7 when we look at the way people organize themselves in queues. Here we want to look at examples of how ethnomethodology has approached 2D visual information, and we argue that its principles can be equally well illustrated by looking at how people use and make sense of visual information such as direction signs and maps in the accomplishment of everyday practical tasks of navigation and way-finding. However, a comprehensive examination of the ways in which ethnomethodology has engaged with 'the visual' as an embodied domain of practices is outside the scope of this chapter.[4]

[4]This has been recently undertaken in an important contribution by Ball and Smith (2011).

Direction signs have received some attention from scholars drawing on semiotics (e.g. Fuller, 2002) but ethnomethodology is dismissive of such approaches because they are invariably speculative rather than grounded in the details of the phenomena under investigation. As Miller and McHoul have argued in their call for EMICS, 'an ethnomethodologically inspired cultural studies':

> cultural studies can benefit most from beginning with actual cultural texts in their ordinary historical and everyday places *before* political and theoretical speculations are brought to bear upon them, *before* they are turned into mere artefacts of social criticism. (1998: 180, emphasis in original)

An example of just the kind of problem that Miller and McHoul identify can be found in Mark Gottdiener's (1995) 'socio-semiotic' analysis of real estate signs. For Gottdiener, that signs are erected for the practical purpose of giving directions and information to people who may wish to enter the new housing market goes entirely unnoticed. In a typical cultural studies 'move' Gottdiener is concerned solely with identifying what he perceives to be the 'ideological codes' which are contained within the signs. Four such codes are discovered: a 'naturalist anti-urban', a 'topographic/geographic', an 'English gentrification' and a 'neo-Fordist'. But it is not clear how these codes were arrived at, whether they are applicable to all other real estate signs or just the ones in the region he studied (the Los Angeles Basin), let alone the more basic question of whether ordinary persons also recognize these codes. But it is precisely these sorts of 'positivist' charges which speculative cultural studies, in its refusal to engage with the phenomenon, leaves itself open to.

Contrast Gottdiener's investigation of signs with the ethnomethodological approach taken by Wesley Sharrock and Digby Anderson (1979) in their examination of directional signs in a medical school complex. Signs in themselves, they declare, are of no sociological interest: rather it is the ways in which they are interpreted and the ways these interpretations occasion practical courses of action which deserve attention. Sharrock and Anderson illustrate their analytic interest in directional signs by showing how 'an ordinary user' of the premises in which they were located might conceivably use these signs in negotiating his or her way around. They argue that the interpretation of signs is an irremediably practical and local matter. Signs are not observed in isolation but in particular contexts and in particular sequences. Finding our way around a building is, quite literally, a procedural affair. Visitors to the hospital may need to follow the directions of several information signs before arriving at their desired destinations. In this process, although signs are encountered 'one at a time', the sequences in which these occur are equally important in conveying information about places or locales.

Sharrock and Anderson present their data (photographs of the signs) in the order in which they encountered the signs as they navigated their own way within the medical school. In this manner they try to recapitulate the practical reasoning which would be employed by users of the hospital. For such people the signs comprise a series in which some are encountered 'earlier' and some 'later' according to their relative placement from the entrance to the building. These authors argue that the relationship between the signs is governed by a 'tree structure', such that signs encountered earlier in a journey are understood as being 'higher up' the tree structure and therefore conveying information which is less discriminating. For example, one of the signs in their series (example C) contains information about the direction of 'lecture theatres' in general, whereas a later sign (example D) provides information about a specific numbered lecture theatre. However, first-time patrons of the building – people for whom the signs are most relevant – cannot see the tree structure as such. Instead such users treat the signs as 'being part of a prospective, unfolding series' in which there is an anticipation that if the general direction given by an earlier sign is followed then we can expect to come across further signs which take us successfully closer to our destination. It is the implications of this sequential structure that suggest to them that:

> The business of 'reading signs' is an embedded activity … As an activity, it involves a highly particularised and localised kind of work, such that we read *this* sign in *this* way because it is *here* and because it is next to *this other* thing. (1979: 90, emphasis in original)

Figures 4.10–4.13 present typical directional signs which can be observed at the University of Queensland campus, which illustrate many of the points that Sharrock and Anderson make. Observe – a point which we have so far ignored – the signs are what Sharrock and Anderson refer to as 'idiomatically expressive' in that the actual directions that are indicated by the arrows are not to be construed as the directions they intend to signify. So for example university students, or visitors to the university campus, on encountering such signs will, we suspect, have no trouble in interpreting the upward-pointing arrows as indicating forward or horizontal movement along a corresponding path or perhaps through the entrance to the adjacent building, although which of these alternatives is correct may need to be established by trial and error. However, the downward-pointing arrows (see Figure 4.11) indicating the direction to 'cashier' or the 'post office' can only mean that a change of level is required and thus the sign sets in train a search for the steps that would be required to effect this. Those specifically seeking the 'J M Campbell Room' (see Figure 4.10) will, presumably, take the diagonal arrow to mean that their route will involve *in the first instance* a left turn on entering the Forgan Smith Building, and that further signs will no doubt be encountered subsequently which will take them to their destination. Finally

the curved arrows in Figure 4.13 appear to be directing students back in the direction from which they have come, although when the sign is encountered in situ it is in fact signalling a sharp turn onto a path which converges with the one on which the way-finder would be currently travelling. However, there is an element of redundancy in this sign as the only people to witness it are, at that moment, in the process of leaving the campus and heading in the direction of the nearby bus terminus.

Observe too, although this point is incidental to our analysis, the way in which the permanent university sign shown in Figure 4.10 has served as a host for a 'parasitic' sign which had been erected to direct visitors to a more distant part of the campus as part of a courses information day. The temporary sign mimics the shape of the permanent fixture and in so doing visibly acquires its meaning. The sign in Figure 4.12 shows how direction finding is facilitated by the inclusion of iconic motifs which indicate something about what can be expected if a particular arrow is followed. For example, a visitor might be unaware that 'CityCat' was the name of the fast catamaran to the city or that 'Dutton Park' was the name of the conventional cross-river ferry. However, the bold underscoring below 'CityCat' suggests speedy water transport while the choppy waves and tubby boat alongside 'Dutton Park' evoke a less glamorous aquatic experience.

The interpretation of directional signs such as these is, of course, not always successful. People can and do misinterpret signs, particularly if they are in a hurry or if they have more obvious practical matters to occupy them: for example, getting to an appointment or lecture on time. Reading signs can,

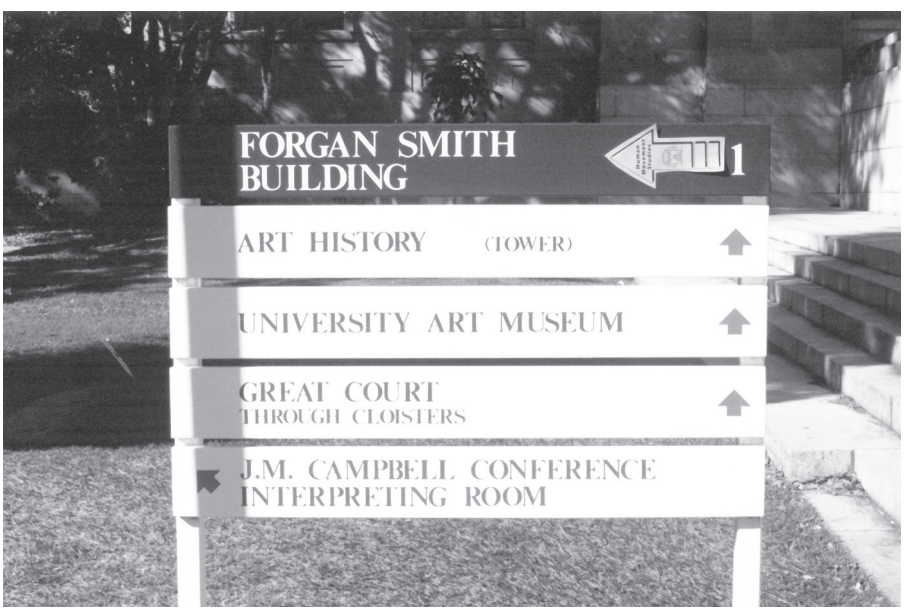


Figure 4.10 *Directional signs on a university campus* (photo authors)

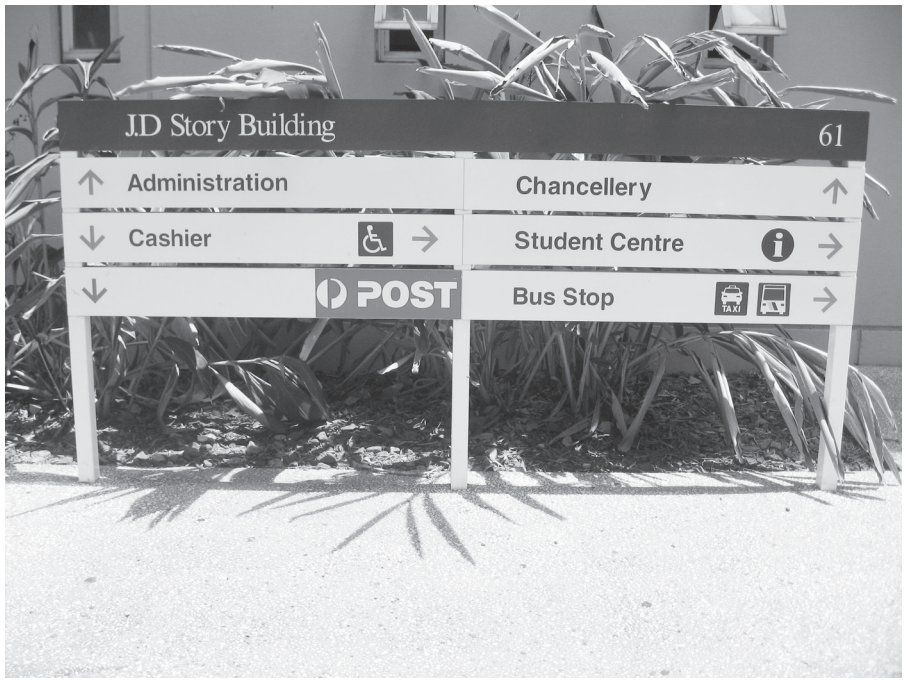


Figure 4.11 *Directional signs on a university campus* (photo authors)

Figure 4.12 *Directional signs on a university campus* (photo authors)

Figure 4.13 *Directional signs on a university campus* (photo authors)

in part, be seen as a matter of economics: how long or how much effort should be spent in arriving at an unambiguous interpretation of its information?[5] But as Sharrock and Anderson note, the errors that people make when following signs have a 'recoverable' character:

> we can try the first thing that seems right, but if it doesn't work, then we can try something else and see if that will work, and if we experience a few failures, that doesn't do much harm or cost a great deal. Certainly taking a wrong turn in a building is often something that can easily be detected as an error, soon after it is made and rapidly recovered by a retracing of steps. (1979: 91)

[5] This is obviously a matter which needs to be taken into account by those responsible for installing or erecting signs. This issue has recently been investigated by Jérôme Denis and David Pontille (2010) who conducted ethnographic research on the work of sign installers on the Paris subway. Denis and Pontille discovered that this was not simply a matter of the installers following broad-brush instructions framed by managers or supervisors. In order to determine the precise location that a particular sign should have, the installers had to reconcile the general signage placement policy with detailed ecological knowledge of the local site. In essence the sign installers had to discover or 'enact' an available place, a process which typically meant they had to consider the sign as it would be encountered by prospective subway travellers.

But while this may well be the case for pedestrian direction finding, such practices are hardly likely to be of use to motorists. It is one thing to retrace one's steps but quite another to rectify a missed turn when one is at the wheel of a car on a freeway. Pedestrians can readily modify their routes, make abrupt turns, or stop dead in their tracks generally without any fear that such activities will occasion collisions with their fellows, but these are not options which are available to drivers. What we find, then, is that these contrasting 'logics of navigation' – finding one's way around on foot as opposed to finding one's way around by car – are reflected in different sign systems. Whereas pedestrians are given only general outlines of where to proceed and must 'work out' the details en route, motorists are invariably given much more explicit visual information as to how to proceed, presumably with the intention of avoiding the kind of recoverable errors that pedestrians routinely engage in. The result is that many traffic directional signs tend to be iconic in that the physical layout of an upcoming road system is reproduced as a constituent feature of the sign itself. Figures 4.14 and 4.15 provide examples of typical iconic traffic signs. In Figure 4.14 the sign provides details of both the shape and orientation of the roundabout (it is oval rather than circular). In contrast the roundabout represented in Figure 4.15 is circular. Motorists encountering both of these signs are thus given explicit instructions on how to proceed with the core feature of the sign mimicking the actual shape of the roundabouts and the exit option routes they will shortly encounter. Motorists intending to visit the botanical gardens shown in Figure 4.15 are particularly well served. They are told which lane they should be in, they have their turn-off iconically marked, and their destination is even coloured coded (brown – the colour for tourism and heritage sites – against a prevailing green background).

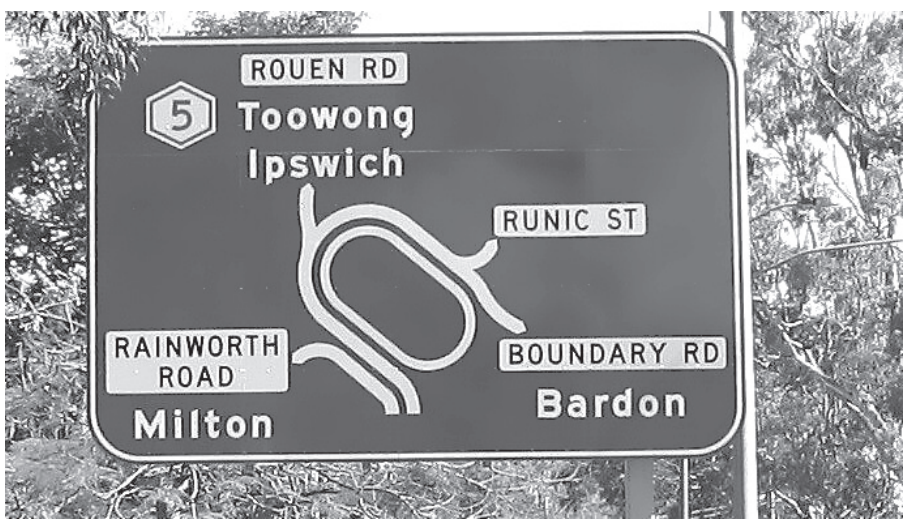


Figure 4.14 *Traffic sign featuring iconic representation of road layout* (photo authors)

Figure 4.15 *Traffic sign featuring iconic representation of road layout* (photo authors)

4.5 EXERCISE

Direction Finding and Common-Sense Reasoning

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes.

The aim of this exercise is to make you aware of the vast amount of taken-for-granted common-sense reasoning which, ethnomethodologists argue, we rely upon in everyday life. The project requires you to find your way around a large complex such as a university but in a way which makes you self-conscious of your 'way-finding' abilities.

From your university or college telephone directory, select the name of a staff member you have no knowledge of and who works in a department at the university that you never frequent. As readers of this book are most likely to be in social science or humanities faculties we suggest you opt for something like 'chemical engineering'. Beginning at the main entrance of the university your task is to locate the room of this staff member using only the directional signs and maps (and, of course, your common-sense reasoning) which the university has erected.

You should take along a notebook and pencil – or better still a digital audio device – to record what you do and, equally importantly, what you think about when you encounter a sign and act on the information you see. Make a visual record of the sign either in the form of a sketch or drawing or better still with a camera. Most universities have a campus map at or near their main entrance and so the first task

(Continued)

(Continued)

would be to locate the building which houses your chosen staff member. Once you have located the building on the map and noted the general area of the campus in which it can be found (itself a task relying on a good deal of practical reasoning) then start your journey towards it. As you encounter signs which you deem relevant record them, but also note the additional information you are supplying which contributes to the direction-finding process. At first this may not be at all obvious but take it slowly and try to work out exactly what it is that you supply to make the sign 'work'. For example, we have already noted above that signs which point 'upwards' are commonsensically taken to mean go forward rather than attempting to launch yourself skywards; think also about inferences or background knowledge required when you encounter things such as maps with coloured shapes, or words such as 'street' or 'forum'.

If you get 'lost' do not ask anyone for directions (although this is an eminently common-sense thing to do!) but retrace your steps to a place you are sure about. Eventually, we hope, you should find the building you are seeking but this is not yet the end of the journey! You still have to find a particular numbered room in the building. Tacit common sense comes into play here: for example, we typically read a number (e.g. '829') alongside the staff member's name on the departmental directory board as indicating that the person will be found on the eighth floor of the building. Even finding this room once we have reached the eighth floor requires further tacit knowledge to determine the numbering sequence and the direction along the corridor to be taken.

At the end of your journey look at what you have recorded in your notebook and reflect on exactly how much information you had to supply. If all this 'additional' information had to be made explicit, then the university would be covered in a veritable forest of directional signs, informational boards and so on!

Ethnomethodological interest in sense making and direction finding has also extended to a consideration of the construction of maps. George Psathas (1979), for example (see also Kitazawa, 1999), has looked at the organizational features contained within maps which have been drawn to assist persons in finding a particular place – typically the home of the one who has constructed the map (see Figure 4.16 for an example of the kind of map which Psathas analysed). Psathas's interest lies in how such maps can be investigated as sites of practical reasoning. That is, they can be understood as documents which both contain and use as a resource methods which are tacitly relied upon by persons who have to accomplish the practical task of getting from one place to another. Psathas finds that 'maps to our place' are never intended to be geographers' maps, 'drawn to scale' or objective. Instead they should be seen as 'maps with a purpose', this purpose being to show the way to a particular place. Such maps operate with a special sense of space. One of the tasks which the map maker has to accomplish is to get people 'onto the map' for such maps are always bounded by a real world beyond the map's space:

> The map begins and ends at its edges. The 'real world' within which its depicted places are depicted as existing is not claimed to end at these edges. There are connections to, continuations of, and extensions onto other roads, areas, and places from the roads, areas and places shown; but these other roads, areas, and places are not shown. (Psathas, 1979: 207)

'Maps to our place' may have multiple starting points and so the core organizational feature to which all other features must be related is the destination. Places, streets, roads, bridges, junctions, etc., which are shown on the map are always in relation to this destination. So places are noted as being 'after' or 'next' in ways which indicate that the sequence in which they are noticed will be confirmation that one is still on the correct route. Distances on such maps tend not to be exact linear measurements, but rather based on these sequential features. To have travelled the distance shown on the maps is to have passed certain streets, intersections or landmarks. Psathas concludes by suggesting that readers of these maps who identify the route to be taken as a 'set of sequential particulars' come to see this as a discovery:

> a discovery whose possibility is provided by the 'map itself', as though little or no work on the reader's part were needed – as though the maker of the map 'did it'. (1979: 224)

However, this is to underestimate the sense-making work which the reader must do. Methods of practical reasoning, then, are something which both map makers *and* map readers must unavoidably rely upon.

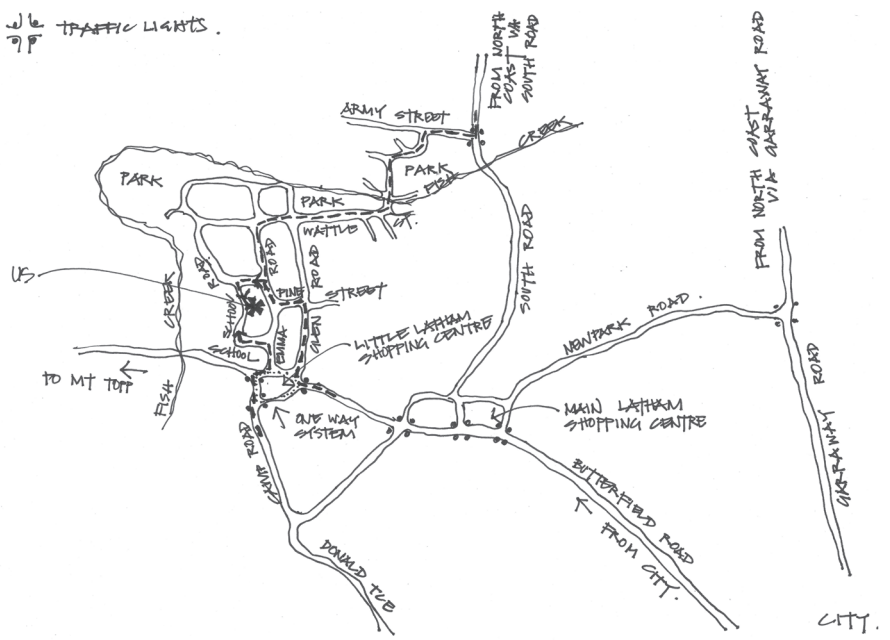


Figure 4.16 *Hand drawn 'map to our place' (authors)*

4.6 EXERCISE

Map Making and Practical Reasoning

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes in class. This is an entertaining exercise and enough time should be allowed for comparisons and discussion – it may be worthwhile for students to prepare their maps in advance.

Psathas includes several examples of different 'maps to our place' in his article. A variation on the research he undertook would be to consider the organizational features of maps which are all designed to get people to the same place. For example, students could be asked to draw a map which shows how to get to a certain location – a central city building such as a post office or a hotel would be ideal. For the purposes of the assignment it should be assumed that the building can be reached by car, although the building concerned may well be located in a pedestrian mall area. The map should be drawn so as to cover the route from each student's residential suburb (this will mean a plurality of differences in how the question of 'getting onto' the map is accomplished) to the central location.

The map should also be designed to be read and understood by someone who is unfamiliar with the city and who therefore has no 'local knowledge' to avail themselves of. If Psathas's arguments about shared common-sense reasoning are correct, then we should expect that there will be a great deal of variability in the places, landmarks, etc., which are included at the edges of the map (the area closest to the different residential locations) but that as the maps converge closer to the central city destination point then they should all begin to exhibit the same (or similar) noticings. In other words, from the multitude of features which could be included on the map we should expect that only a limited repertoire will be used. If this does not turn out as expected then look for possible reasons as to why. Standard sociological factors might come into play here: for example, do men include different features (sports stadiums, petrol stations) from women in the design of their maps?

We conclude this discussion of the ethnomethodological tradition in visual research with an example of the analysis of a 'pictorial message' undertaken by someone seemingly far removed from the ethnomethodological school but whose comments about the image point in surprisingly the same direction. We refer to the illustration which the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) included on one of its deep-space probes launched in the 1970s and the analysis of the message made by art historian Ernst Gombrich. The illustration in question is shown in Figure 4.17.

Gombrich's basic argument is that the pictorial plaque would fail dismally in its intended purpose: in short, that it is not a good example of the kind of mutual common-sense or practical reasoning we have been discussing. According to press releases at the time of the launch of the probe, NASA included the plaque 'on the off chance that somewhere on the way it is intercepted by intelligent scientifically educated beings'. The assumption was that these beings would easily be able to work out where the probe was from and

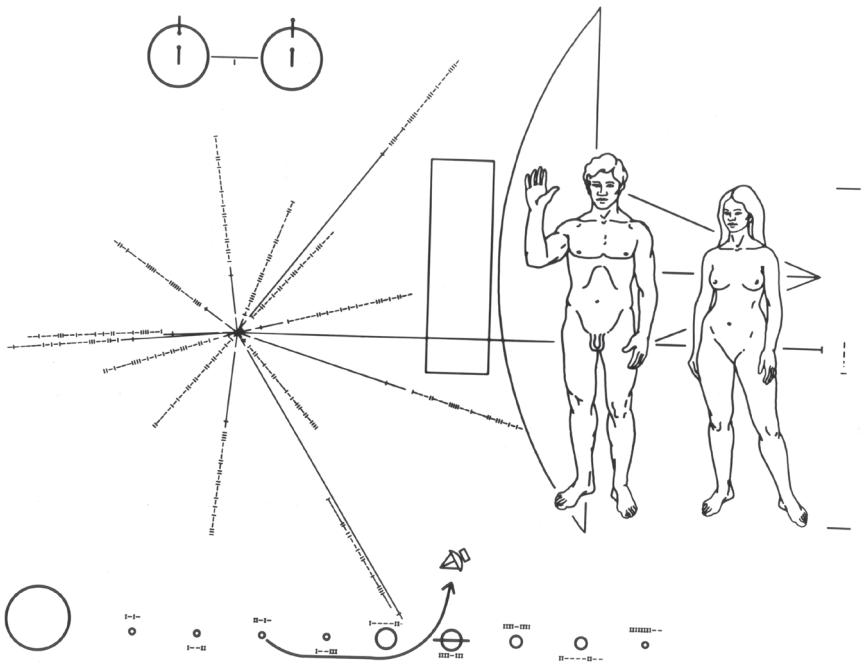


Figure 4.17 Pictorial plaque from the NASA space probe, Pioneer

Source: Gombrich (1996)

gain some idea of the creatures that were responsible for sending it and their friendly intentions. Almost all the design features of the plaque, Gombrich points out, rely on the use of taken-for-granted knowledge which simply could not be assumed to be possessed by the inhabitants of planet Zogg or wherever else the probe ended up. For a start, these beings would have to be equipped with sense organ 'receivers' (eyes) which respond to the same band of electromagnetic waves as ours. As for the human figures themselves it is only our common-sense knowledge that feet are for standing on and eyes are for looking that allows us to see these as solid recognizable configurations. Our scientifically educated space creature, Gombrich comments, 'might be forgiven if they saw the figures as wire constructs with lose bits and pieces hovering weightlessly in between' (1996: 54). The plaque even embodies conventional understandings about gender relations with the female figure positioned slightly behind the male and with her trunk angled towards him so that her right arm 'tapers off like a flamingo's neck and beak'.

The plaque has the human figures drawn to scale against the outline of the probe but if those viewing it in deep space have a sense of perspective the craft would be conceived as much further back 'which would make the scale of the manikins minute'. As for the greetings gesture, 'not even an earthly Chinese or Indian would be able to correctly interpret this gesture from his

(sic) repertory' (p. 55). Finally Gombrich notes there may well be confusion in distinguishing between the two diagrams – the first detailing the 14 pulsars of the Milky Way as a means to pinpoint the location of our sun, and the second which shows the planets of our solar system. Here the trajectory of the probe departing from earth and swinging into space past Jupiter is shown with a directional arrowhead, an entirely conventional symbol unlikely to be recognized by anyone who has never encountered a bow and arrow.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have tried to show how images and other forms of two-dimensional visual material can not only be subject to standard forms of decoding or interpretation, but also serve as tools for the investigation of concepts and processes which are at the heart of social science inquiry. Moving away from an interpretive framework, however, requires some effort precisely because the kinds of two-dimensional images we have looked at seem naturally to invite this kind of investigation. In the chapter which follows, where we turn to examine the use of three-dimensional objects as data for visual analysis, our task becomes a little easier. In general we think of objects as things to *use* rather than as things to be *read*. While we will show that reading objects is a worthwhile task, we will also show how they can be appropriated for more traditional sociological ends. Finally the astute reader will have recognized that, although we have treated directional signs as another form of two-dimensional visual data, our investigation of these has, strictly speaking, exceeded their two-dimensional form to the extent that it has drawn attention to their practical uses in particular environments. In this sense we have already begun to touch on the issue of spatial contexts and the interplay between settings and human movements. We return to this issue in Chapter 6.

5

Three-Dimensional Visual Data

This chapter will:

- Introduce objects or 'material culture' as a resource for visual research.
- Suggest ways that interactions between people and objects can be explored.
- Consider the advantages of objects over texts within visual research, in particular the fact that stronger inferences can be made to populations than is the case with texts.
- Identify a number of everyday sites where objects can be studied, such as homes, cemeteries, toilets, museums and car parks.
- Discuss some of the limitations of a purely visual approach to objects.

A theme of this book is the need for visual research to move beyond the collection and interpretation of photographs. This is not to suggest that there is anything intrinsically wrong with the study of photographs. Rather we see their study as simply one arrow among many in the quiver of the visual sociologist. We began the move away from the photograph in the previous chapter by pointing to the research possibilities built into generally under-rated forms of visual data such as maps, signs, posters and cartoons. Yet with the exception of signs, these alternate forms of data are two-dimensional and share with the photograph a textual existence. In many cases they are also 'images' which can be approached as things to be 'read', just like the photograph. In this chapter we push still further away from the photograph and orthodox visual inquiry in three ways. Firstly we introduce three-dimensional (3D) objects as a resource for visual inquiry. In so doing we move visual research away from the text

and the image and towards the seen. Secondly, while we suggest the possibility for semiotic readings of objects, we will also argue that they allow a wider variety of inquiries to be grounded. In particular they can operate as unobtrusive measures of social processes and can allow inferences to be made to populations. Thirdly, in so far as objects are distributed and arranged in environments, rather than having a virtual existence on the page, questions of lived space and place become central to their understanding.

The semiotics of objects and beyond

In previous chapters we have explored the analysis of 2D data, partly in terms of semiotic approaches. In looking at news photographs and posters, we identified ways to decode images and work out how they operated as signifiers to convey particular messages. We begin this chapter by pointing to the possibility of decoding the 3D as well. The focus on advertising within Barthes-inspired cultural studies has become so ubiquitous that we often forget that in many of his essays he looked not at adverts and images, but at things themselves. Barthes was able to do this because he understood that mythologies were not simply layered on top of the 'real world' by post hoc advertising campaigns, but rather were built into fabric of objects and practices at the point of design or construction. Their existence, consequently, was material as much as textual. A classic illustration of this position is Roland Barthes' essay on the (then) 'New Citroën'. Barthes was writing about the Citroën DS, a car with sleek lines that was technologically advanced for its time (the 1950s). He likens the car to 'the great Gothic cathedrals' and asserts that they are perceived as a 'purely magical object' which is consumed in image by the entire population. Barthes emphasizes the smoothness and shape of the car, and suggests its curvaceous glass contributes to a light, spiritual quality: 'Here the glass surfaces are not windows, openings pierced in a dark shell; they are vast walls of air and space, with the curvature, the spread and the brilliance of soap bubbles' (1973: 89). He also points to a countering domesticity in the interior: 'it is now more homely, more attuned to this sublimation of the utensil which one also finds in the design of contemporary household equipment. The dashboard looks more like the working surface of a modern kitchen than the control-room of a factory' (ibid.). Nonetheless, the overall impact of the New Citroën is to 'actualise the essence of petit-bourgeois advancement' (p. 90).

5.1 EXERCISE

Decoding Cars

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

Following in the footsteps of Barthes decoding the car is a worthwhile exercise for sharpening interpretive faculties. Select two contrasting cars (e.g. 4-wheel drive, luxury sedan, small urban car, etc.). With the owners' permission, look them over thoroughly, inside and out. Write around 200 words on each car. Try to discuss the following themes. What kinds of messages (think: keywords) are you able to read into the materiality of the car? Which aspects of the car carry which messages? What kinds of larger mythologies does the car seem to tap into? To what extent have practical imperatives (e.g. cost, functionality, legal requirements) compromised semiotic possibilities?

Note: You may wish to extend the project by comparing your analysis of the car itself with a further study of advertising that is used to promote it. Does the advertising suggest that your reading of the car was one with which the manufacturers and distributors would agree?

Barthes' essay on the New Citroën, then, demonstrates the availability of objects for semiotic analysis. But it also points beyond this. Hidden away in the essay are clues suggesting that we might be able to do more with objects than with 2D texts. One of these is to observe people in interaction with objects:

> In the exhibition halls, the car on show is explored with an intense, amorous studiousness: it is the great tactile phase of discovery … The bodywork, the lines of union are touched, the upholstery palpated, the seats tried, the doors caressed, the cushions fondled; before the wheel, one pretends to drive with one's whole body. The object here is totally prostituted, appropriated. (Barthes, 1973: 90)

Interactions with objects, then, are a source of visual data from which we can make inferences about social life – in this case the popularity (or, as Barthes would have it, ideological success) and comparative sensual appeal of the Citroën DS. It is also important to remember that the car does not exist in a vacuum. Objects are always positioned in particular spatial contexts – in this case the exhibition hall where touching was permitted. Spatial settings, then, are of great importance in understanding objects and their relationships with humans. Elsewhere in *Mythologies* we find other hints at ways objects can be used in sociological analysis. In his essay on children's toys, Barthes claims that artisanal wooden toys are superior to bourgeois manufactured toys. They are organic and human rather than soul-less and sterile. In building this argument he points to the qualities of wood itself, which 'Does

not break down; it does not shatter, it wears out, it can last a long time, live with the child, alter little by little the relations between the object and the hand' (1973: 54). Here Barthes prefigures another source of visual data that we will explore in this chapter – the study of traces. Just as the wear and tear on a wooden toy betrays a history of use (and presumably enthusiasm) so does more general wear and tear allow inferences to be made about repeated social activity.

In this chapter we will pursue these themes – the semiotics of objects, the importance of settings, the visibility of human interactions with objects and the ability of objects to record traces of human activity. Our general concern, as always, is to suggest that objects can operate as indicators of wider socio-cultural processes and therefore serve as a tool for a theoretically informed exploration of social life.

Four advantages of objects for sociological research

As Barthes' work suggests, not only can objects be read or 'decoded' in much the same ways as their 2D cousins, but also they offer other equally as exciting possibilities. To begin with, we can tell very little about social processes by observing someone reading. It is for this reason that media studies scholars have often turned to audience ethnography (interviewing people) in order to work out the impacts that particular texts might be having. In contrast, people do things with objects which are witnessable to a pair of open eyes. People pick things up, they carry them, they wear them, they drop them, they wash them, they polish them, they tread on them, and so on. All of these activities provide fuel for visual sociology. Importantly they allow us to develop behavioural measures. That is to say, they allow us to make inferences based upon what people actually do. Studies of 2D texts (by contrast) generally allow us to study cultural belief systems and ideals as abstractions, but are of less use in exploring what really happens on the ground.

The sheer visibility of many objects is another bonus for the researcher. If we walk down a typical suburban street we will not be able to determine much about the reading habits of the occupants of each of the houses we pass, or how they view advertisements. Nor could we determine their sexual preferences or whether or not they are a stamp collector. To explore such issues we would need to intrude on their lives with an expensive and time-consuming interview or survey. There are, however, some things that we can deduce purely by using our eyes. Many objects are difficult to hide. And many activities leave behind them traces that are difficult to obscure. In that same street we can easily observe gardening styles or whether the residents drive hybrid cars. These may sound like trivial issues, but each of them can serve as an indicator of a broader social process of significant theoretical

interest. Cultural assimilation can be examined by looking at whether migrants have adopted native gardening styles. Hybrid cars indicate ecological concern. Comparisons over neighbourhoods could be fruitful.

A great attraction of these very visible sources of information is that they allow us to explore social life covertly. Because respondents are not necessary for many kinds of object-centred inquiry, the usual problems of normative responding (telling the researcher a socially acceptable answer) are not present. While ethnography or interview research is sometimes required to flesh out the meanings of objects and improve our inferences, we can often get by without them. As such, the study of 3D data is ideal as a source of what is generally called 'unobtrusive measures'. Many of the projects suggested here and in the remainder of the book fall into this category of research where we can collect data about social life without directly involving respondents in the research process. In some cases, however, we might suggest that you talk to people. This will allow them to explain the significance of objects and their locations, permitting you to augment explanations and test whether speculative inferences are valid.

A final bonus with objects is that they are generally more 'democratic' than much published data. What appears in texts (2D data) is often the work of intellectuals and experts such as journalists, photographers and advertising executives. These people can be thought of as an elite, or as 'gatekeepers', and their output as a reflection of their particular concerns, values and world views. Many objects, by contrast, are intimately related to everyday experience and everyday practical activity. They often provide a better indicator of the lifestyles, choices and experiences of ordinary people. In this way they share many of the advantages of the online locations discussed in Chapter 8 such as photosharing sites and Facebook.

People and objects

Before moving on to look at some of the more exotic forms of material culture, it is useful to begin by looking at ordinary objects and everyday settings. Objects are not just 'things', rather they are reflections of the wider lives of communities and individuals. This point has long been made by anthropologists with an interest in material culture. According to one authority, the concept of 'material culture' suggests 'a strong interrelation between physical objects and human behaviour' and in particular the 'culture behind the material' (Schlereth, 1985: 3). The corollary is that, far from being dull and uninteresting, artefacts can tell us a great deal about individuals and collectivities.

To date, the validity of studying material culture has been recognized for the most part by anthropologists and archaeologists. Attention from sociologists, cultural studies scholars and others has been slight. As a result much of

the existing literature is of only marginal interest to those interested in studying complex industrial societies. Anthropological concerns, for example, have led to a particular consideration of the relationship between objects and their makers. This focus on the craftsperson and on handicrafts mirrors the centrality of pre-industrial societies to mainstream anthropological research. There is also a strong tradition in the study of material culture which looks at objects as indexing a disappearing or long-disappeared way of life. The concerns here, which closely parallel many approaches to photography, are centred around heritage preservation, documentation and archive management (e.g. Quimby, 1978; Schlereth, 1985). Another use of objects can be in the field of cultural history. The anthropologist might study household furniture over the centuries in order to make inferences about, say, sleeping patterns in the family. These sorts of historical concerns are usually (but not always) of limited interest for the wider community of researchers within social and cultural fields.

For these reasons we ignore most work in the field of material culture. We do not attempt to provide an overview of the field nor discuss its merits nor its leading theorists. Nor do we introduce the dense and theoretically challenging philosophical debates within the field about the ontological and epistemological status of objects.[1] Rather we try to suggest ways in which objects can be incorporated into small-scale visual research. We draw upon a variety of work which has used material culture as a way of tapping into the social and cultural processes of complex, contemporary societies. As the projects we suggest will make clear, we are also interested in exploring material culture less as a way of documenting a society-wide 'way of life' (as in traditional anthropological studies of material culture) and more as a means of exploring differences between groups and individuals. We begin this task by looking at the study of objects in ordinary settings. Our focus will be on the following interrelated themes which we trace in a number of sites:

- **Cultural consumption.** The concern here is with the ways things can be used to indicate social status, cultural belonging and taste preferences. By looking at objects and, to a lesser extent, the ways people interact with them we are able to make inferences about how they see themselves and about their levels and forms of cultural capital.
- **Personalization.** The focus in this case is on the creative ways in which mass-produced objects are transformed to display individuality and identity. There are

[1]These debates have traditionally been organized around scientistic and hermeneutic polarities and have reached their most developed state in the discipline of archaeology. On the one hand it has been argued that objects contain objective information which can be retrieved using formal methods and advanced field and laboratory technologies. On the other it has been asserted that objects encode meanings which have to be retrieved through a process of culturally sensitive interpretation. More recent interventions from 'post-processualist' archaeologists have been influenced by postmodernism and highlight the indeterminacy of objects and the ways that their meanings shift according to the frames of interpretation that are applied to them.

strong links with studies of cultural consumption and with symbolic interactionist traditions.

- **Use.** Objects can be used as objective and unobtrusive indicators of social activity. We can either directly observe people using objects, or else look for clues that they have been used. Studies of 'traces', for example, look for the marks people leave behind them on objects in their everyday lives.
- **Culture, knowledge, belief and ideology.** These can be investigated by exploring the ways that social values, discourses and epistemologies are encoded into objects and can be read from them. Semiotic and interpretive methods are central here.

One of the earliest and most important ways of exploring material culture in a sociological manner came with studies of consumption. A founding contribution was Thorstein Veblen's (1912) writing on conspicuous consumption. Veblen noticed that people made use of the observability of objects in their everyday lives. He showed how artefacts of material culture were often deployed in an overt display as a way of attesting to social status. Things, in short, were useful as status markers. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has provided perhaps the most important contemporary project in this tradition. Bourdieu's work points to the ways that people's cultural consumption is structured by class location. A growing ethnographic tradition has followed Veblen and Bourdieu's footsteps, and has taken everyday objects in the home as a key tool for exploring taste and consumption. We illustrate some approaches to the home with an unlikely resource – the television.

Television

Television provides arguably the most important arena of cultural consumption since the 1960s. Although viewing practices have changed due to the Internet, downloads and cable, survey research shows that watching television – or at least the television screen, which might also show movies or be hooked up to online streaming – remains the most popular leisure activity. Finding out what people watch, and how they watch it, is a topic that has been very common in cultural studies. One thinks of research using audience ratings to measure trends in viewing, or of ethnographies which explore the various ways in which viewers have 'decoded' programmes ranging from the 1980s' hit soap opera *Dallas* to the news. Needless to say, expert readings of television and films programmes (which usually aim to detect ideological bias) are also a common type of research. Such research is clearly about the visual, although these kinds of projects use methodologies (surveys, focus groups, the analysis of moving images) which are beyond the scope of this book. In effect they are the domain of mass communications and media studies texts.

With all this attention on the television programme, it is easy to overlook the fact that the television itself is open to a different kind of visual inquiry, one that looks at the 'hardware' of the television monitor rather than the 'software' of content. Relatively little attention has been given to the television as a physical object and to its place in the domestic setting (Morley, 1995: 180). Yet the television is, in a sense, an object of the consumption in and of itself regardless of what one watches. One can study that consumption without even knowing what programmes people watch. David Morely suggests that once this divergent perspective is taken a number of issues arise:

- The meanings of the television (e.g. the big-screen, high-definition TV, as a status symbol).
- The spatial arrangement of the living room (e.g. the television replaces the hearth as the 'sacred' focus of the space).
- The visibility of the television (e.g. is it proudly displayed or hidden away?). Some research suggests that more affluent groups are embarrassed to have a large screen, while poorer people proudly display this as a source of status.
- The 'domestication' or 'personalization' of the television set (e.g. placing objects near the set).
- The movement of screens into other parts of the house (e.g. the kitchen, the bedroom), indicating a more 'informal' attitude to viewing.

Any one of these factors can provide fertile ground for visual research.

5.2 EXERCISE

The Television in the Home

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

Gaining insight into real homes traditionally required ethical clearance but has been made easier by the Internet. Real estate companies generally post photographs of homes. Although there might be problems with the selection of images, angles, etc., that could lead to 'missing data', these do offer a place to start when it comes to investigating the home. Develop a coding sheet based on the bullet points above. Select two price brackets, one affordable and the other very aspirational. Scan through images of 10 homes in each bracket. Do any significant differences emerge in the treatment of the television screen as an object of material culture?

Pictures and photographs

Pictures and photographs are, like television, usually treated as 'texts' which have to be read by art historians and cultural studies scholars. They can, however, be looked at in a much more matter of fact way by shifting the focus from decoding 'hidden' content and reading them as a text to looking at manifest themes and also exploring the social and spatial correlates of their display. A project by David Halle (1993) exemplifies this possibility. In his study of New York housing Halle explored interior decoration in houses of the upper, middle and lower classes. One of his most striking findings was that across all groups the landscape was by far the most common form of picture, making up around one-third of all pictures prominently displayed on walls, outnumbering even pictures and photographs of family members. In terms of content the pictures overwhelmingly depicted calm and tranquil settings. Rarely could one detect a snowstorm blowing, a volcano erupting or a river rampaging through rapids. When questioned, respondents said they liked pictures which made them feel relaxed. Halle argues that such pictures reflect a contemporary orientation to nature as a domain of leisure, and of the home as an escape from the busy outside world. Another feature of the pictures was that they rarely included people, unless they were of past settings. This again reflects a set of cultural beliefs which suggest that the enjoyment of nature is at its best when it is a private experience. While there were these commonalities across classes, Halle detected some differences between groups. Higher status households were more likely than lower status households to have pictures which depicted the past and which depicted foreign settings.

Halle also looked at photographs in houses. The vast majority of these were of family members. Photographs of non-kin were extremely rare. Photographs were also overwhelmingly informal in terms of composition, setting and clothing. Whereas a couple of generations ago most photographs would have been taken on a special occasion by a photographer, Halle found that casual family snapshots were most likely to be displayed. Often these were clustered together on crowded mantelpieces or pinned on boards in a montage. There was, however, an apparent taboo on large, portrait photographs of the adults in the house, reflecting a belief that to display a picture of oneself on one's own wall would be egotistical. According to Halle, the content of these photographs reflected wider social shifts. They mirrored the rise of informality and privacy in American social life. Halle's work, then, suggests that pictures and photographs can be used to explore shifts in ideology about the meanings of the family and self.

5.3 PROJECT

Pictures and Photographs in Houses

Estimated time required: This is a major project that could sustain a thesis. Several days are required, although a pilot with friends could be conducted in about 1 hour.

A possible limitation of Halle's study is that it was conducted in one part of the USA, for the most part in 'typical' family dwellings. While this allowed him to make close comparisons of class differences, it did not permit him to look at other issues. Interesting questions remain about the generalizability of his findings to other settings. Identify either a non-Anglo ethnic group or a non-traditional household (e.g. student share housing). Use a snowball sample to recruit new participants. This means starting with people you know and asking them to nominate others. Some softening up by phone or letter may be required before you visit strangers. As you visit each house make a list of the themes of each picture and its location in the house. Are the patterns of picture and photo use the same as among Halle's New Yorkers? In what respects do they differ? Why might this be? What can you conclude about the significance of Halle's results? Do they tap into a global trend or just a provincial taste in one part of the USA?

Objects and possessions

Another particularly fertile area for visual research is that surrounding 'special objects'. Things that people designate as 'special' or 'treasured' allow the sociologist to home in on cultural and value patterns. To date most such work has involved non-visual methods. For example, Ian Woodward (2001) found that interviewing people in their homes about objects they considered to be of special importance to themselves (typically ornaments, kitchen appliances, furniture) provided a way to get insight into wider cultural patterns and anxieties surrounding consumption. By contrast N. Laura Kamptner (1995) used survey research when she tried to discover which objects were particularly salient to her sample of Californian high school students. For males the most treasured possessions were music, sports equipment and motor vehicles. For females they were stuffed toys and jewellery. The survey also suggested divergent meanings were attached to the objects. For males the value lay in entertainment, whereas for females the favourite objects carried social meanings: they were important because someone had given them the object or it was used in social contexts. In a similar way Marsha Richins (1994) used survey research methods on special possessions to unpack differences in consumption between respondents characterized by high and low materialism. She asked them to name and explain their favourite objects. Materialists were more influenced by aesthetics and use-value. Less materialist people associated their objects with opportunities for pleasure and social

experiences. Finally, most recently within this tradition, Rachel Hurdley (2010) has examined mantelpiece displays and how the objects located on these spaces were used by her respondents in the narrative construction of their identities.

Insightful though such studies might be, they do present problems of normative responding. People might self-censor or offer socially acceptable accounts of which objects are important and why. A purely observational study of homes and bedrooms – such as we suggested for pictures and televisions in the projects above – might provide a check on such accounts. This is most clearly the case when collections and displays are made of particular objects. If they are given pride of place in a setting then we might reasonably assume they are truly important to the people concerned (see Riggins, 1994). We could be content with this unobtrusive measure or go on to ask about these highly visible display objects. The act of photography can also provide another method to derive an unobtrusive measure. In a much-cited study, Melanie Wallendorf and Eric Arnould (1988) used mixed methods to investigate favourite objects in the USA and in a peasant economy in Niger, Africa. The many cross-cultural and cross-gender differences they discovered need not concern us here. What is pertinent is that they had respondents photographed with their designated objects. They discovered that when objects were meaningful by virtue of personal ties (a gift, a special memory of a friend, etc.) people were more likely to touch or embrace the object in the photograph. By contrast, when it was the intrinsic properties of the object that made it desirable there was more likely to be a distance between respondents and objects. Here we have another unobtrusive measure of attachment that could be deployed in various contexts.

The museum

Michel Foucault's (1973; 1979) work suggests that in institutional environments we will find visual traces of power and discourse. While this claim is most obviously relevant to large-scale built environments, and will be discussed in more length in the next chapter, it has application also to the analysis of material culture and its display. Museums provide an excellent venue for a visual sociology of power and knowledge. You have access as they are public spaces that you are entitled to enter. Moreover, they consist of objects of some purported significance that have been purposively arranged and displayed in order to convey information. Thinking about why certain objects have been selected and which cultural meanings are embodied in the process of display can provide a wonderful resource for small-scale visual research. An example of this comes in the recent work of Michael Welch and Melissa Macuare. They toured the Argentine Penitentiary Museum in Buenos Aires,

making a close reading of the exhibits room by room. They write 'we examined the collection of objects ... so as to identify a dominant narrative being told by the State about the State' (2011: 402–403). They observe that some aspects of the museum, such as the offices, the cells and information on prisoner routines, portray its identity as a formal, rule-governed institution of modernity. Other displays tap into themes such as morality, national identity and the sacred. For example, the presence of a crucifix over a bed indexes the sacred; an historical poster on justice suggests a moral mission to reform and cleanse. After reviewing the museum Welch and Macuare conclude that it conveys a narrative in which the technical/administrative concerns of modernity are fused with the moral concerns of the Catholic Church to point to the legitimacy of the prison system as a noble project. Notably excluded from this story of progress are the human rights atrocities committed by the state during Argentina's brutal dictatorship.

Just how do museums accomplish this narrative task? Henrietta Lidchi (1997: 159) suggests there are several significant features to museums which in combination give them great cultural power.

> *Representation* refers to the claims of the museum to reflect some larger order of phenomena in microcosm.
>
> *Classification* deals with the way that the museum divides its exhibits into distinctive themes, topics or classes of objects.
>
> *Motivation* refers to the purpose of the museum. Aside from the preservation of artefacts, this usually includes educating and informing a wider public and is seen as socially legitimate
>
> *Interpretation* is the function of museums to provide a coherent understanding of the purpose of its exhibits and to place them within a broader framework of meaning.

According to Lidchi, as with Welch and Macuare, museum displays are about ideas as much as objects and they can therefore be read or 'decoded' by the sociologist. Her illustration of this theme looks at the ethnographic museum as this has changed over time. Pitt Rivers was a Victorian collector of archaeological and ethnographic items who subscribed to the hierarchical and evolutionary views of his time on the rise of 'civilization'. These suggested that more complex and 'superior' cultures had emerged from primitive peoples. Artefacts were therefore exhibited by Pitt Rivers according to type (like animal species) and in ways which indicated increasing sophistication of design (like animal evolution). There might be a display on weapons, for example, which started with stone arrows and clubs and 'worked its way up' through bows and arrows to muskets and machine guns. This form of display was designed to allow ordinary Victorians to understand the process of social evolution and to read the location of their own society at its pinnacle. According to Lidchi, the Augustus Pitt Rivers type of arrangement allows us to

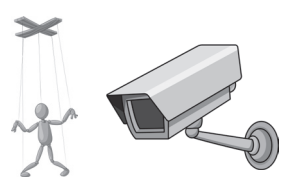
understand the complex discursive formation involving science, evolutionary theory and colonialism that was at play in Victorian England.

Due to a growing post-colonial critique of such displays, ethnographic museums have become very sensitive to criticisms that their forms of representation contain hidden bias and that they privilege the views of powerful groups (Clifford, 1995; Lidchi, 1997). They have also become very aware of claims of cultural and scientific imperialism and grave robbing. They have responded by changing some of their display procedures. Results have included:

- Displays and exhibitions seeking to record and validate the material culture and life experiences of forgotten groups (e.g. a display on women's lives).
- Attempts to foreground the process of constructing an exhibit (e.g. a panel in which the curator explains the process of selecting items for display, often in conjunction with indigenous representatives).
- Greater attention to the political contexts (e.g. discussions of the detrimental impacts of colonialism, multinationals, genocide on a particular tribal people).
- Efforts at cultural relativism (e.g. Coca-Cola cans displayed next to a traditional drinking vessel. Accompanying description draws parallels between them: 'Each is a powerful symbol in its own society').
- Pointing out the positive role of the museum in preserving cultural heritage (e.g. photographs of museum staff working alongside indigenous people) rather than appropriating it.

A generic problem with scholarship that 'decodes' museums is that we never really know if visitors 'get' the intended message. They might not be as intellectually stimulated or as sensitive as academics. Our next exercise tries to see if they communicate effectively after all.

5.4 EXERCISE



Ethnographic Museum Exhibits

Estimated time required: Up to 2 hours. As a project, this activity could be expanded to a larger project by increasing the time spent and the level of detail collected and analysed.

Visit a museum with ethnographic exhibits. Code any of the devices identified above as you observe them. In order to work out the kinds of impacts these displays are having, loiter near the exhibit (try to look like just another visitor). Using a notebook, collect qualitative information on the response of the public. What kinds of remarks do they make to each other? Do they seem to take an interest in the 'new' spin or do they tend to skip over these aspects of the exhibit? Are they more interested in the purely 'exotic' artefacts or in educational discussions on, say, the developing world? To get an objective measure you

(Continued)

(Continued)

could also try noting the amount of time they spend at each display panel or area. Look also for age, ethnic and gender differences. What are you able to conclude about the success of the museum's policy in terms of the concepts of motivation and interpretation?

As the above exercise will have demonstrated, public institutions can provide excellent research sites for visual sociologists intent upon exploring power, ideology and discourses through the analysis of displays, pictures and texts. While museums seem to have attracted a good deal of attention in this post-colonial era, there are a number of other locations worth thinking about. Churches, town halls, national park centres, sports clubs, universities, art galleries, etc., will often have displays documenting their perceived role in society. These can be 'decoded' in much the same ways as museum exhibits. Which groups are represented in the displays and which are absent? How have new ideas and responses to the discourses of what is pejoratively called 'political correctness' been incorporated into photographs, models and mission statements? How have the displays attempted to head off typical complaints; for example, that the art gallery is 'elitist', that sport is 'mere entertainment', or that a particular church appeals only to a given race or demographic?

Of course museums and galleries offer many opportunities for the visual researcher other than simply exploring power and representation. The work of Christian Heath and his colleagues (Heath et al., 2002), for example, investigated the challenging but also fundamental question of how people engage with art works. Making use of ethnomethodological perspectives and video recordings of people in a gallery, the team showed that art viewing was profoundly collective and social, not solitary and contemplative. In the case of the installation they studied, people would draw the attention of others to the art exhibit as something notable rather than as something to be walked past. They would also show each other what to look for in the exhibit, demonstrate the appropriate emotion (in this case surprise, happiness) and tell people where to stand so that hidden cameras could project them into the scene they were observing. We return to this theme of observing people with exhibits and displays in the next chapter.

Statues and memorials

Statues and memorials provide one of the best resources for visual researchers interested in exploring the intersections of semiotics, power and ideology with material culture. This is because, like museums, statues and memorials

are deliberately created to convey messages – usually by dominant groups. Decoding these messages is an important sociological task, and one that can be done using similar conceptual resources to those used to study advertisements, paintings and other 2D data. Because they are displayed in public settings, statues and monuments provide a convenient and accessible resource for such activity (see Figure 5.1 below). This location, moreover, allows us to conduct observational studies which explore how people respond to them and what they might therefore mean. It is also worth remembering that many public monuments, memorials and statues are (literally) 'dated'. Thus, they can be used to index changes over time in cultural values and beliefs. Before proceeding to consider issues of codes and action it is worth remembering that statues can support more positivistic, less interpretive sociologies. This is demonstrated in the following exercise.

5.5 PROJECT

Gender Bias and the Statue

Estimated time required: 2+ hours. As an in-class exercise, 30–60 minutes for class discussion. Teacher or assistant to select an area, map and photograph statues in advance, for discussion by students in class.

Feminists have long argued that the public sphere has been dominated by men and that women have been marginalized. Statues provide a way of testing this assertion. If feminist theory is correct, we would expect statues of men to outnumber those of women in public memorials. Using a city or town map, mark out the defined area of what you consider to be the city centre. If you live in a large city use your local knowledge to identify 'hot spots'. Systematically survey the streets and squares in the area. Code the number of males and females in statues. If possible note who they are of (politician, military, etc.), and when they were constructed or dedicated. What are you able to conclude about:

a Male dominance of the public sphere?
b The kinds of males who are considered 'important' in our society?
c Changes over time in the proportions of men and women who are commemorated?

Decoding and observing statues

Semiotic and observational studies used in combination provide one of the best ways of understanding monuments. The oft-cited study of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC by Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Barry Schwartz (1991) provides a classic example of this kind of approach. For the USA, the Vietnam War was not only a controversial event, but also a defeat. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz argue this is reflected in the semiotics and

phenomenology of the memorial. Instead of the usual heroic monument above ground, the Vietnam memorial sits low. It consists of:

> two unadorned black walls, each about 250 feet in length, composed to 70 granite panels increasing in height from several inches at the end of each wall to 10 feet, where they come together at a 125 degree angle … the walls themselves are placed below ground level, invisible from most vantage points. (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz, 1991: 393)

Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz interpret this design as drawing the viewer into a separate warp of time and space. In other words, the design of monument works to cut people off from everyday life. They also see the wall as embodying 'femininity' with its 'womblike embrace of the visitor' and as challenging traditional masculine notions of the 'phallic' statue. Moreover, the design focused attention on the individuals who lost their lives rather than their (tarnished) cause.

Protests about the wall came from veterans and others. They saw the list of names as like a list of traffic accident victims. They interpreted the black granite and the lack of traditional memorial referents as insulting and unpatriotic. Subsequently a flag and a realist statue of three soldiers was incorporated into the complex. Here again, however, we can detect ambivalence about the war. The statue shows soldiers who 'appear disoriented … Exhausted and confused.' The flagpole is conventional enough, but an inscription at its foot speaks of the pride of the soldiers in 'Having fought in difficult circumstances.' This is an oblique acknowledgement of the controversial and morally contested nature of the war. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial, then, can be decoded or read. It can be explored for themes and contradictions between themes. Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz argue that one way to think about memorials is in terms of the genre they represent. A war memorial, for example, can be heroic or tragic. The Vietnam Veteran's Memorial seems to fall between both genre stools. Its semiotics is ambivalent, reflecting the multiple and contested meanings that people made of the war itself.

An especially instructive feature of Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz's methodology is that they go beyond this semiotic level of analysis to look at how people responded to the memorial. Despite initial controversy and semiotic ambiguity, the memorial has proved to be incredibly popular. Many visitors leave behind a form of visual data: souvenirs and mementos. These are collected each day and stored in the Museum and Archaeological Regional Storage Facility. The most popular of these are small US flags set in the ground near the name that the visitor wishes to commemorate. Just behind these in terms of popularity are military souvenirs such as badges, dog-tags, etc. This suggests that visitors were responding to the wall in traditional ways. While it had been designed as an apolitical memorial to personal loss, its users wished it to be a conventional shrine. They wanted the fallen represented as genuine patriots, not as sad failures.

The case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial suggests the utility of a two-step approach to the visual analysis of memorials. Firstly, semiotic decoding; secondly, the analysis of how people interact with them. While cultural studies

Figure 5.1a Figure 5.1(a–f) Statues and monuments as indicators of social and cultural processes (photos authors). These statues and monuments were all photographed in, or adjacent to, the Brisbane central city area and can be assumed to represent the values and priorities of Australian civic culture. Photo (a) depicts a composite tableau embodying many discourses of Australia's colonial past and its iconic wildlife. On the elevated section of the tableau the pioneer Andrew Petrie is being bid farewell by his devoted wife and family as he departs on horseback on one of his explorations. His youngest son Tom is shown happily playing with Aboriginal children while the scene is being observed by an ex-convict whom Petrie had nobly freed. From a critical perspective it might be argued that the tableau endorses the patriarchal family and trivializes the oppression of Aborigines and convicts.

(Continued)

Figure 5.1 *(Continued)*

Figure 5.1b

Figure 5.1c The statues in photo (b) celebrate the iconography of the rugged Australian male and the bonds of egalitarian mateship as the men chat around the campfire.

Figure 5.1d Photos (e) and (f) depict rugby football heroes, Wally Lewis and Darren Lockyer, both former captains of the Queensland and Australian national teams, whose bronze statues are prominently displayed on the concourse outside the main Brisbane sports stadium. Women – other than monarchs – rarely have monuments dedicated to them.

(Continued)

Figure 5.1 *(Continued)*

Figure 5.1e Where they do, as in photo (d) of pioneer trade unionist Emma Miller, the statues are typically in more peripheral locations away from the main pedestrian routes. Interactions with statues can also tell us something about the priorities of the general public.

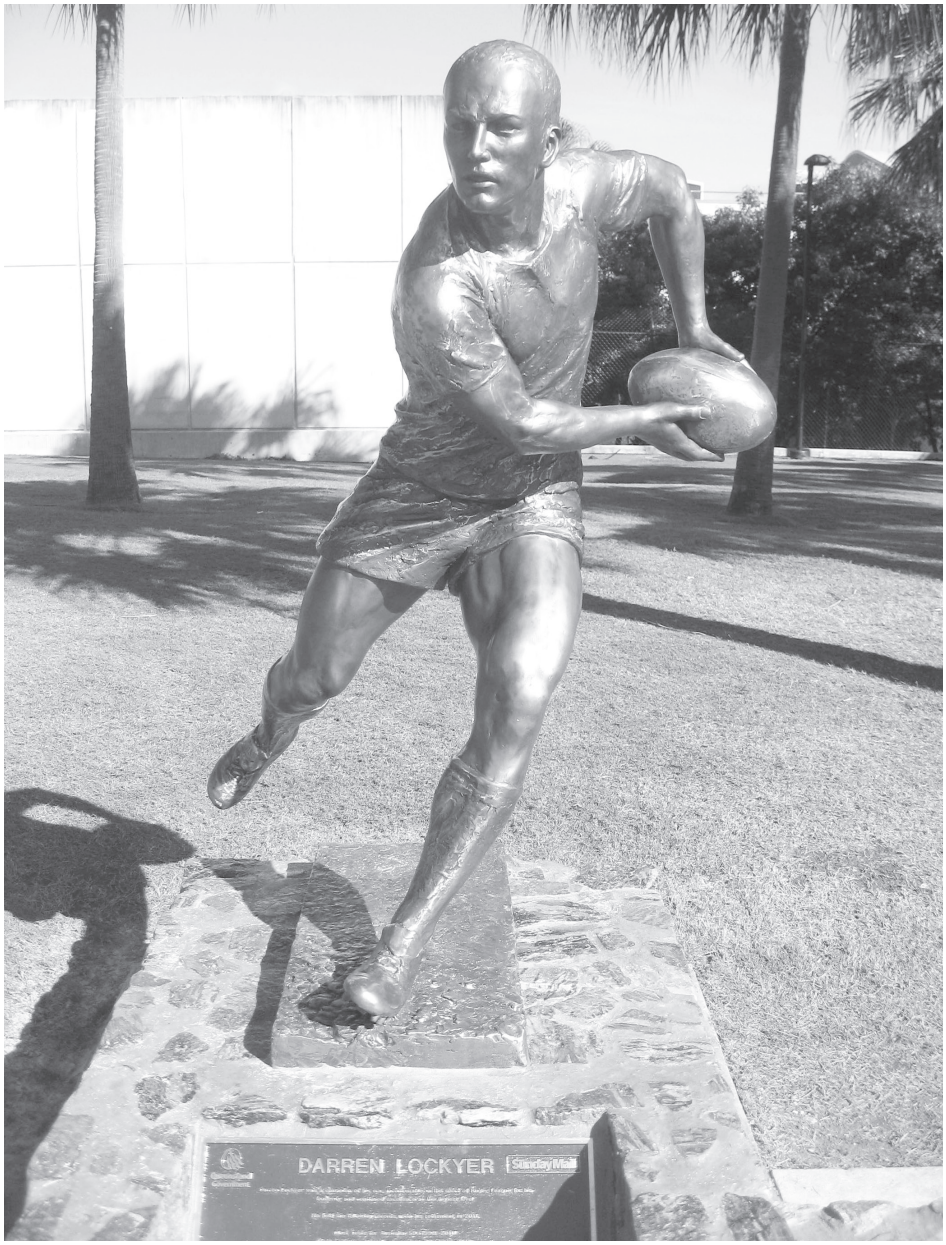
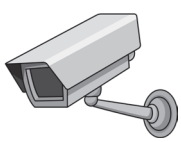


Figure 5.1f For example, the kangaroo family shown in photo (a) provides a popular photo-opportunity for locals and international visitors alike (photo c). By contrast, in the course of several visits to the city centre we have yet to observe anyone being photographed with Emma Miller. Note also in photo (d) that several years after it was broken off in a minor act of vandalism, the city council have still not replaced her iconic furled parasol (see inset). One can imagine the outcry if a similar fate befell the statues of Lewis or Lockyer and the rapid response to restore them to their full glory.)

work has a long history of research on the first dimension, the uses of monuments and statues has been less explored. Perhaps future trends in memorials will bring attention to this neglected method. While traditional memorials and statues were intended to be looked at with awe and reverence, over recent decades attempts have been made to stimulate interaction and intimacy. An example is the statue unveiled in the late 1990s near London's Trafalgar Square to celebrate gay writer Oscar Wilde. The statue is a granite slab in the form of a sarcophagus. It shows Wilde in a reclining position and 'invites passers-by to sit on it and engage in conversation with Wilde's bronze head and hands' (the *Times*, 1 December 1998). We may assume that if this sort of action takes place, then the statue is of some interest to contemporary people, and, indeed, that they feel some kinship or affiliation with Wilde. We might even be able to make an oblique inference about the acceptability of gay identity in contemporary London.

One need not study monuments that are designed, like Wilde's, to foster interaction in order to explore this dimension. One may visit cemeteries where the famous are buried, such as Highgate Hill (Karl Marx), Forest Lawn (various Hollywood stars) and Père Lachaise (Jim Morrison, Oscar Wilde, the Communards), and look for fresh flowers or graffiti as a sign of endorsement. On a recent trip to a Paris cemetery one of the authors of this book visited the grave of August Comte and found no flowers or cards. What does this say about current interest in the founder of sociology? The next project takes up this sort of theme, and explores interactions with statues and monuments.



5.6 EXERCISE

Interaction With Statues

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

Return to the statues you identified in the previous assignment. Conduct observations at a number of them for specified time periods.

a What kinds of interaction do you observe (e.g. photograph taking, climbing, discussion)?
b Do certain statue-topics seem to generate more interaction than others (e.g. animals v. humans v. abstract)?
c To what extent does the design, setting and scale of the statue seem to influence interaction?
d Which types of people interact with which kinds of statues (e.g. adults v. children)?
e What, if anything, are you able to conclude about public interaction with statues? Does the semiotics or political message of the statue play a role, or do convenience and curiosity seem to be more significant factors?
f How do you classify the interactions (e.g. playful v. solemn)?

The cemetery

Studies of cultural consumption and of personalization suggest that identity is fundamental to the way we relate to material objects. Our identities are inscribed upon the objects we surround ourselves with. The inscription of identity can also take place literally at our next research site – the cemetery. Cemeteries can provide an under-utilized and unobtrusive measure of various social processes. We can, of course, classify gravestones in various ways: for example, materials (marble, sandstone, etc.), decoration (plain, with pictures), forms of writing (gothic, roman), complexity (vaults, railings). These sorts of features allow Anthony Synnott (1985) to claim that social divisions persist in death as in life. In his analysis of Montreal cemeteries, Synnott points to several ways in which cemetery organization can be read as reflecting wider social organization. Synnott found:

- Religious divisions separated the dead. Jews were buried in the Jewish cemetery, Catholics in the Catholic cemetery and Protestants in the Protestant cemetery.
- There were class distinctions among the dead. A number of features worked to reinforce these, including plot sizes, plot location and monuments. The affluent tended to have elaborate mausoleums with brass doors, the middle classes statues, and the lower classes simpler gravestones. The welfare poor were buried in public cemeteries in unmarked graves. In general, affluent people were buried on top of hills, with poorer people in the dips and valleys.
- Ethnic distinctions could also be found. Chinese tended to be buried in one zone of the Protestant cemetery and Ukrainians in a large lot in the Catholic one. Many tombs were decorated in particular ethnic styles. The Irish, for example, might have a Celtic cross on their grave.

Synnott's analysis is largely descriptive. However, the kinds of features he identifies can be used to explore wider sociological themes than one might at first expect. Consider the next project, which raises a host of possible issues for tombstone research.

5.7 PROJECT

Ethnic Graves

Estimated time required: The time needed for this project will be variable and will depend to a large extent on the area in which you live. However, estimates of 2+ hours are realistic.

This project uses gravestones as an unobtrusive measure of ethnic integration. Theories of assimilation suggest that over time ethnic ties become weaker. While first-generation migrants might hold strongly to their traditional culture, second- and third-generation

(Continued)

(Continued)

migrants slowly shed ethnic identification and feel they are members of their host nation. Is this the case? One way to find out is to study tombstones. Firstly, conduct some library and Internet research to identify ethnic groups which are likely to have migrated to your area. Try to form some estimate of the date of first arrival en masse. Select a local cemetery and see if you can detect evidence of a significant number of burials for this group. Names on gravestones and biographical information will help (e.g. Luigi Baldini, Born Rome 1910, Died Melbourne 1950), as might inscriptions in the language of the group you have chosen. If there appear to be a number of burials, proceed to the next stage. Draw a sketch map of the cemetery and locate on it the site of the graves which you can identify as belonging to your chosen ethnic group. Colour code each gravesite according to decade (e.g. 1950s blue, 1960s red, 1970s green). When you have finished look at the distribution of the graves for each decade. According to assimilation theory, there should be a trend towards dispersal. Just as ethnic groups move out of housing ghettos, we might expect ethnic graves to be increasingly dispersed among the general population of graves.

Notes: (1) This project might work less well when the migrant group has its own cemeteries. This is often the case if they have a distinctive religion. It works best when the migrant group shares a religion with a significant proportion of the host population. Catholic cemeteries are therefore often best for the exercise. (2) You can back up your argument with further measures of assimilation. A shift away from native language towards host language on gravestones would be one indicator. (3) You can extend the project by comparing the dispersal and assimilation patterns for more than one group, or by looking at rates of dispersal for nineteenth-century migrant groups as opposed to twentieth-century migrant groups. (4) Some commentators argue that we are seeing ethnic revivals. This means that people are rediscovering their ethnic 'roots'. Is there any evidence for this in your study? Are tombs from the 1980s, for example, more likely than those of the 1970s to have distinctive 'ethnic' features? (5) Another project along similar lines to this one might look for changes in sexism or family orientation. One could count and date inscriptions along the lines of 'Jane Doe, beloved wife of John Doe'. These identify women in terms of their relationship with a man. It would be interesting to see if these have declined over time. One could also compare these sorts of inscriptions across religious denominations. For example, are Catholics more 'sexist' than Protestants?

Customizing anonymity: cars and houses

We live in a world where the vast majority of objects are mass produced. The dominant perspective for approaching this fact in sociology has been critical theory. Writing in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin (1973) commented on the alienating qualities of 'mechanical reproduction'. A few years later his Frankfurt School colleagues Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979 [1947]) attacked the 'culture industries' which they saw as producing standardized products (e.g. movies, popular music) aimed at the lowest common

denominator. In the 1960s critical theorists such as Herbert Marcuse (1968) spoke plaintively of the capacity of consumer goods to produce passive, shallow citizens – a 'one-dimensional man' – obsessed with the acquisition of stereos, washing machines and automobiles. This all sounds very bleak. Yet when we look at ethnographic research we find that people are not simply recipients of mass-produced goods, they are also modifiers. A number of studies have pointed to the ways that impersonal objects are adapted to express individuality or community.

Theoretical discussions of standardization, along with analyses of mass production, have often used motor vehicles as the paradigm exemplar of the anonymous consumer good. Henry Ford's Model T, in particular, was famously said to have been available in any colour, so long as it was black. Sociological discussions on the meanings of vehicles suggest that while they may be produced in uniform, rational ways, their consumption is often marked by efforts at 'personalization'. This concept refers to the ways that people adapt their environment to suit their own needs and desires. In his oft-cited study of motorbike gangs Paul Willis (1978) looked at the symbolic meanings of the bike. He pointed to the ways that bikes had been customized to fit the self-image of the rider and the collective identity of the gang. Leather tooling, laid-back seats, lowered suspension and noisy exhausts made the bike as mean, masculine and threatening as possible. Studies of Mexican-Americans have drawn attention to the 'low-rider' cars favoured by younger urban males. Such cars are typically large American models with expensive paint jobs, chrome wheels, massively powerful sound systems and 'hydraulics'. This last term refers to suspension which can be raised or lowered through the operation of pumps, allowing the body of the car to appear to jump. Such cars are typically used for display and the acquisition of prestige among peer groups rather than routine transportation (Cintron, 1997). According to criminologist Jack Katz (1988: 91–92), the vehicles can be read as reflecting the distinctive outlook and personality of their *cholo* owners:

> The low position of the cholo's aristocratic squat is repeated in the automobile esthetic of the low rider. By altering stock shocks and springs, cholos make cars ride literally low … The overall effect is less an approximation of the advertised modern man in an up-to-date car than a fantasy image of a prince in a horse-drawn chariot, sometimes racing each other.

Analyses like these are in a similar vein to that of Barthes on the New Citroën, with which we started this chapter. However, there is a crucial difference. Barthes was concerned with decoding the motor vehicle itself and tracing its links to bourgeois mass culture. The literature on customization, by contrast, tends to see the object as a tool with which to understand the owners, their creative activity and their (often deviant) value system. Yet customization need not be transgressive. Research on bumper stickers, for example, shows that individuals can use these to express reasonably

innocuous things like philosophical attitudes (e.g. 'Life's a Beach'), political and sporting allegiances, patriotism or holiday memories. The literature on bumper stickers confirms their utility for the visual sociologist as an unobtrusive measure. For example, John E. Newhagen and Michael Ancell (1995) sent out teams of researchers to neighbourhoods with different race and class compositions in Washington, DC. They coded over 5000 stickers for themes, emotions (positive or negative) and the strength of the emotion expressed. High-income people were less likely than low-income people to have stickers regardless of race. When they did have stickers, higher income whites tended to express strongly positive emotions. Higher income African-Americans tended to have more subdued stickers and to avoid politics. Blue-collar African-Americans, by contrast, were higher users of stickers. These tended to express support for sports teams, whereas blue-collar whites were more likely to have stickers expressing opinions on political and social issues. They conclude that each demographic has its own expressive style and that visions of the USA as a land of political and social detachment need to be questioned.

Stickers can also be used to track transformations. In Europe, countries are small and so cars frequently cross borders. A sticker identifies the country of origin – something the police might need to know if they have to trace the licence plate. Nasko Kriznar (1993) observed a switch from a Yugoslavia (YU) to a SLO (Slovenia) sticker following the dissolution of Yugoslavia (into Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, etc). By adopting the new stickers Slovenians were signalling their allegiance to the new state and rejecting the project of a larger Yugoslavia that had dominated during the Cold War. Stickers were in effect an unobtrusive indicator of the birth of a new Slovenia. They also contributed to the process or shaped reality by making Slovenia a visible reality in everyday life. It could be seen to exist.

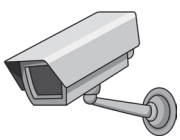
The capacity of stickers to make a particular reality visible is evident in the case of 'family' figure stickers which adorn the rear windows of cars. The stickers, first introduced in Queensland but now found throughout Australia and in several other countries, depict the members of the family in whimsical cartoon form, often with hobby or occupational paraphernalia (tennis racket, surf board, laptop), and sometimes with pets as well (see Figures 5.2a and 5.2b; the full range of stickers that is available can be seen on websites such as http://www.familystickers.com). Casual observation suggests that these nearly always show heterosexual families with a number of children. The family group is usually arranged in descending order of height – an ordering that gives priority to a dominant male, then an adult female, then the children presumably in birth order and even the family pets. A visit to the Internet suggests that concerns about safety (e.g. stalking the single mother) may prevent alternative family forms from being displayed. It is also possible that norms play a role. 'Deviant' examples seem to be rare and too often express a macho orientation to the world. Figure 5.3, for example, riffs

on the visual conventions of family stickers – in effect it is a customization of a common customization. Here a gun collection is arranged in the family group way. Observe that this sticker would make little sense without an implicit understanding of the family sticker visual convention. The next project explores these systematically.

Figure 5.2a *Typical 'My family' car sticker* (photo authors)

Figure 5.2b *Typical 'My family' car sticker* (photo authors)

Figure 5.3 *'Deviant' 'My family' car sticker* (photo authors)



5.8 EXERCISE

My Family Stickers

Estimated time required: 1 hour. As a more detailed project: 2+ hours.

Visit a large shopping mall or town centre where there are likely to be a number of cars either parked or driving past and where you can observe them. For each car with 'family stickers', code for family roles denoted by the stickers (e.g. father, grandmother, daughter, dog, guinea pig). Afterwards, analyse your data. What kinds of families are represented? What are the proportions of 'traditional' and alternative families that are displayed? What can you conclude about family stickers? Do they reproduce conventional understandings of gender and the family by proliferating a particular representation in public space? Did you collect any other 'deviant' examples? What can you deduce about the inclusion of animals in family groupings?

You can extend this research by comparing different locales. For example, looking at the cars dropping off children at a suburban primary school, compared with cars in the city centre or in the car parks of trendy inner city areas. A more thorough project could also code/compare for how family sticker combinations or representations might vary depending on the type of car being driven.

Cars apart, another arena for personalization is the home. In the contemporary world relatively few people live in unique, architect-designed residences. Most people inhabit relatively uniform, forgettable houses and apartments in

developments and estates. Distinguishing oneself from one's neighbours and creating a sense of identity is important for most dwellers. Daniel Miller (1988) looked at residents in a public housing project and the ways that they had transformed their kitchens. This could involve anything from hanging a few pictures and tea towels to repainting and complete remodelling. While class was more or less a constant on the estate, Miller detected ethnic and age differences in preferences for kitchen modification. It is a worthwhile project to replicate Miller's work in another setting and we need not spell one out here. However, an issue you may confront with research that looks at people's homes is the question of privacy. In order to collect data you have to intrude into people's lives. Some respondents might find your presence threatening. They may feel you are there to question or mock their taste. In conducting his own research on the home and its decoration, Riggins (1994: 102) found that his inquiry 'put the self-esteem of informants in jeopardy because of the intimate link which exists between the self and domestic objects. Any questions bearing on the latter are too easily construed as a questioning of the former's social status and personal life.' In a recent tutorial in an introductory sociology subject, we found something similar. We asked students to classify activities and preferences into high and low cultural capital. Many of them were outraged when the tutorial group as a whole classed their favourite rock band or hobby as 'low cultural capital'. So be careful what you say and stress that you are not being judgemental.

If you feel uncomfortable dealing with people and entering their homes, all is not lost if you wish to explore modifications to the dwelling. If you look at the outside of the house you may well be able to conduct a quiet and covert study, taking advantage of the ability of 3D data to offer unobtrusive measures for visual inquiry. Windows and doors, paint schemes and renderings, ponds and plants, ornaments and garden gnomes can all be used to express individuality in the exterior of a property that faces the street.

5.9 EXERCISE

Home and Garden Modifications

Estimated time required: 2 hours plus travel time.

Select streets with new, relatively uniform housing in two contrasting areas. One should be working class and the other more upscale. Tally and classify the kinds of changes you detect in the front garden along the front side of the house. For example, a different front door, a garden pond, a gnome, some plantings. Which social class seems more concerned to demonstrate individuality rather than maintain conformity/uniformity? To what extent is affluence a constraint?

In some cases building codes and residents' associations can limit the kinds of changes that people make. Mission Viejo in California is often studied by postmodern

(Continued)

(Continued)

sociologists as an example of a community which revolves around a Spanish Mission theme. This upmarket, suburban development has strict guidelines about design (must be Spanish in style with a tile roof) and paint colours (must be white, pastel, etc.). Such places provide a challenging environment for the would-be personalizer. If you are able to locate such a place, it should afford an excellent location for detecting the very subtle ways that people make a house into a home.

Wear, tear and rubbish

As we noted back in Chapter 4, photographs often provide an excellent 'unobtrusive' or 'non-reactive' measure of social process. Perhaps the best such measures, however, are not photographs. In some cases past behaviours by people leave behind them physical evidence which can be used as the basis for sociological deductions. Sometimes this evidence might be left behind deliberately, as is the case with graffiti; at other times it might be unintentional. Studies of traces and accretions focus on this latter type of data and use it to make inferences about human behaviour. According to Webb et al. (1966: 35) in their now classic text on unobtrusive measures, 'physical evidence is probably the social scientist's least-used source of data, yet because of its ubiquity, it holds flexible and broad-gauged potential'. Webb et al. distinguish between two general types of physical evidence or traces. *Erosion measures* try to identify wear and tear on materials. As this chapter exemplifies, we tend to think of the study of objects as the study of things. The study of erosion measures reverses this. Instead of looking at what is there, we can look at what is not there. Specifically, what has been worn away, scratched or polished by use. Take a look around any old building, such as a church or town hall, and you should be able to locate erosion measures such as the following:

- Stairs are worn into a concave shape, due to millions of feet eroding the material at the centre.
- Door handles and stair rails have been polished by thousands of hands.
- Ceramics in the toilets will have been worn and stained by thousands of gallons of urine.
- Keyholes will be scratched as keys are scraped around in search of the lock.

Accretion measures are deposits of material that have built up over time due to human activity. It seems to be rather harder to think of accretion measures than erosion measures. By far the most frequently used accretion measure in sociological research is garbage. Traces like these provide a wonderful unobtrusive measure of use. Archaeologists in particular are skilled in using traces

to make deductions about life in past societies. For example, a worn kerbstone might allow some kind of inference to be drawn about the volume of traffic on a Roman road. An ancient Egyptian knife that is barely used might have been ceremonial, or intended for display rather than for day-to-day use. Making use of traces and accretions in this way is often likened to the work of a detective attempting to make sense of what has gone on at a murder scene from the various bits of physical evidence that remain.

Traces can be looked for on a remarkable variety of research materials, including movable objects. Second-hand cars, for example, used to be 'clocked'. This means that an unscrupulous dealer would wind back the mechanical odometer and fool the customers into thinking they were buying a car with less mileage than it really had. If you think this might happen to you, then a study of traces could be of use. Indicators of wear can include pedal rubbers, carpets, the driver's seat cloth, scratches, dents, sagging door hinges and sun-faded paint. While seat covers and floor mats might have been used in the past, and body and paint work can be fixed up, pedal rubbers are almost never changed. So beware of pedal rubbers which do not match mileage!

5.10 EXERCISE

Statue Wear and Tear

Estimated time required: 1–2 hours.

Earlier in this chapter we suggested an exercise in which you observe people interacting with statues. These interactions would tell us something about social values: for example, that people like animals or that gayness is socially acceptable. There is another way to accomplish this task, which is to look for signs of wear. The heroic sled dog Balto pulled urgent medical supplies through Alaska. He has been the subject of numerous children's books and even a film. We can tell that people like Balto (and dogs in general) simply by observing his statue in Central Park (see Figure 5.4). Visiting the statue we notice Balto's shiny back, ears and nose. These reflect the activity of children who sit on the statue and passing adults who spontaneously rub his nose. Of course it is not just dogs (or kangaroos) which display signs of human interest. The famous statue of political leaders Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill ('Allies' by sculptor Lawrence Holofcener) in London (Figure 5.5) shows abundant evidence that many people have sat between them on the bench.

Return to the statues you coded before. What signs of human activity can you find?

Webb et al. (1966) and Alan Kazdin (1979) provide a number of further examples of how useful erosion and other unobtrusive measures can be. The following suggestions are adapted from their text. Because these all deal with physical traces, issues of meaning and interpretation can be put to the side. While commonly discussed as 'qualitative methodologies' these

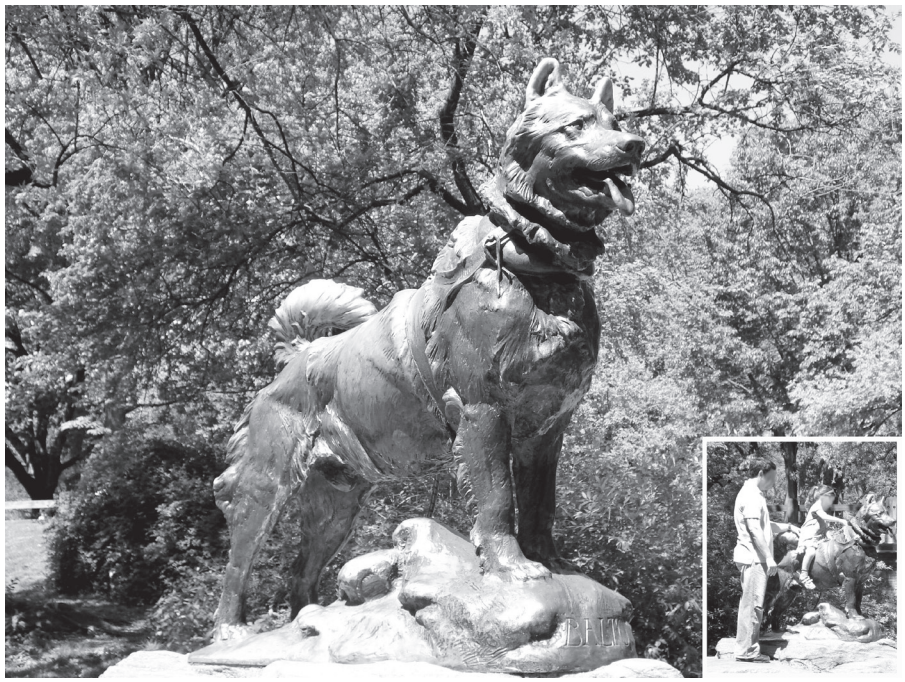


Figure 5.4 *Statue of Balto the sled dog* (photo authors)

Figure 5.5 *Statue of Roosevelt and Churchill* (photo authors)

sorts of projects really work best when simple counts or scales are used to provide a more objective level of wear and tear. If necessary, follow-up interviews and observation can be used to address issues of 'why?' and 'who?' which are difficult to tap with a purely observational study of this kind of data:

- At the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry the floor tiles around an exhibit of live and hatching chicks needed replacing every six weeks. The tiles normally lasted for years in other parts of the museum. Webb et al. suggest that through such a measure we could test the hypothesis that 'dynamic exhibits draw more viewers than static ones' (1973: 37).
- The wear on library books affords a measure of their popularity, or the popularity of various thinkers and paradigms. In order to validate this measure, wear could be compared with the library records of withdrawals. Obviously older books would have more wear, so age would need to be taken into account in developing your measure. It is also possible to look for signs of use in individual pages and see which themes are held to be more engaging. Books in university libraries often contain underlined passages where students have (illegally) marked sections they consider useful for study. Other sections of texts also seem to attract more attention than one might expect. When one of the authors of this book was undertaking his anthropology degree, he noted that in ethnographies by classical anthropologists such as Malinowski, sections dealing with sex and sexual life were more worn than others. The implication would seem to be that students had taken rather more interest in the sexual practices of 'exotic' peoples than in their kinship systems!
- The amount of interaction between people in certain locations can be traced by looking at the number of cigarette butts in the ashtray or on the floor, or exploring the amount of coffee consumed. Volumes of litter might also perform the same function.

Rubbish offers perhaps the best form of accretion data. There is a lengthy history of rubbish being used to gather information on consumption. Archaeologists have long had an enthusiasm for middens (ancient garbage heaps). From the contents of the midden we can work out what people ate in the past. From this we can sometimes make deductions about social structure. For example, to kill some animals, like the mammoth, collective hunting strategies would have been needed. If we find mammoth bones on the midden this allows us to make certain deductions about complexity of social organization in a prehistoric population, or perhaps its ability to use language to coordinate a hunting strategy. Rubbish research has a dedicated following in sociology too. People are generally careless with what they throw away, but careful about what they keep. As a result, things that are deliberately preserved are often doctored or edited to create the right impression rather like a memoir. Rubbish, on the other hand, is assumed to be of no interest to anyone. By looking at rubbish, therefore, we can often get a better idea of what is going on than by talking to people. These points are made clear in the case of alcohol research.

Research on alcohol consumption normally makes use of either surveys or diaries. These research methods are flawed. Participants in a study might be tempted to minimize their reported consumption in the search for social approval. They might forget to fill in the diary, or, in the case of the survey, have little idea when answering the question 'On average how many beers do you drink in a week?' (Can you answer this question accurately? Unless you are teetotal, how do you know you remember accurately?) An alternative approach is to look for physical signs of alcohol use. Rummaging through rubbish bins for beer, wine and spirit bottles provides a surprisingly good measure of alcohol consumption at the community level (Webb et al., 1966: 41). According to William Rathje (1978), an analysis of garbage shows that interview-survey data on beer consumption consistently underestimates true levels of consumption. Low-income households were prone to non-reporting and middle-income households to under-reporting. The next project, which suits people who like getting dirty and smelly, builds on this sort of finding.

5.11 EXERCISE

Alcoholic Rubbish

Estimated time required: 30 minutes.

This exercise compares recall against hard evidence as forms of data. Most households today have a recycling bin for bottles and cans. On the day of the week that yours is collected, first estimate how much alcohol of various kinds has been drunk in your house. Next go through your bin and find out the real quantity. Were you able to form an accurate estimate? To calculate total alcohol consumption add on what you drink at pubs and clubs. In light of any earlier discrepancy, do you trust this last estimate? Note: It is especially interesting to conduct this test after a party!

Graffiti

Graffiti form a special kind of residue. It is something that people leave behind, but unlike other kinds of trace or residue, this is done consciously and intentionally with the hope that others will encounter it. Messages are encoded into graffiti using text or drawings. Graffiti are also, in some ways, a 2D form of data. It is a form of communication consisting of an image on a (usually) flat surface. In some ways it is also a property of places and spaces. Consequently, we were uncertain whether to put graffiti in this chapter or the previous one or the next. We eventually chose to treat graffiti as a 3D form of data because it exists in situ on objects. Properly studying graffiti usually means moving beyond the library and the printed page, and engaging with the world of material objects. The physical location of the graffiti is important in understanding the context and intended audience. For this reason, studies of graffiti usually

distinguish 'public' and 'private' graffiti. 'Public graffiti' are located where they can easily be seen by the passer-by. Examples include walls and underpasses. 'Private graffiti' are found in back stage places such as toilets. Such graffiti are usually not intended for a general public audience. Graffiti studies have a long history in the social sciences. A good deal of work is informed by cultural studies and critical theory. It interprets the aesthetics of graffiti in theoretically complex ways and often in terms of the politics of place and identity. Another line of work uses ethnography to understand graffiti subculture (e.g. Ferrell, 1993). Yet graffiti are also amenable to treatment as an unobtrusive measure of diverse issues, often in quantitative ways.

One surprising thing that graffiti can measure is group cultures and individual responses to situations. For example, Jacqueline Wilson (2008) looked at graffiti in an abandoned but perfectly preserved Australian jail attached to the Melbourne Magistrate's Court. Both gender groups expressed hostility to authority and especially the police. However, graffiti in the male section of the jail were more aggressive. There was a thematic focus on power, sex and revenge. In the formerly female areas the graffiti were more concerned with expressing friendships (including lesbian affection) and building networks. Wilson interpreted this as a response to likely post-trial sentencing. All the women were likely to end up in one women's prison. Friendships formed in the jail could have lasting value for subsequent prison welfare. However, the men were more likely to be dispersed all over the state.

Wilson used a range of mixed methods including photography. Yet she did not code her data, a strategy used by John Klofas and Charles Cutshall (1985) in what is perhaps the most impressive quantitative study of graffiti we have encountered. They looked at graffiti collected from the walls of an

Table 5.1 Types of graffiti recorded at an institute for juvenile guidance

Percentage	Category	Description
35.7	Personal identifier	Names, names and places, initials
4.6	Group identifier	Group names, places, name strings
1.9	Slurs and insults	With names or place names
21.8	Teen and romance	Girls' names, hearts and initials
7.8	Criminal justice rel.	Police, crime and IJG, biography
6.6	Activism	Contemporary political slogans
1.3	Race	Praise, slurs, other references
1.5	Outlaws	Swastika, iron cross, etc.
1.1	Drugs	Drug names, slang, pictures
1.0	Sex	Sexual references, drawings
2.5	Religion	Religious symbols, references
2.0	Obscenity	Unconnected obscenities
12.3	Miscellaneous	Cartoons, song titles, doodles
100		
(2765)		

Source: Klofas and Cutshall (1985: 362)

abandoned juvenile correctional facility in Massachusetts. Two teams of recorders transcribed verbatim data from walls. Each transcription was also coded as to location (e.g. individual cell number, corridor type). In total there were 2765 items. The breakdown is given in Table 5.1 which also serves as a nice example of a coding schedule.

Klofas and Cutshall note the high percentage of inscriptions which located people in terms of 'personal identifiers' (e.g. 'John from Boston was here), and the large numbers of inscriptions which could be identified as 'teen romance' (e.g. love poems). Surprisingly under-represented in the graffiti was material of a sexual or racist nature or material dealing with drugs. Exploring the location of the graffiti also provided dividends. Material on cell walls that were visible to outsiders tended to feature tough and aggressive themes, while material on the other walls tended to be more contemplative. During their time at the institution the boys were moved through zones to areas with increasing privilege. Klofas and Cutshall show that the themes of the graffiti vary between these zones. Identity-related graffiti were more prevalent in the first zone, suggesting a defensive reaction to the depersonalization of the 'total institution'. While the proportion of personal identity graffiti decreased during incarceration, 'romance'-related inscriptions increased. This might reflect the impact of visiting privileges, with inmates turning to future plans as a coping strategy as the sentence progressed.

The study by Klofas and Cutshall may be hard to reproduce, given problems of access to similar locations, but it does contain three key lessons. Firstly, that graffiti can provide an unobtrusive measure of human responses to institutions. Secondly, it suggests the importance of coding graffiti into categories so that patterns stand out. Thirdly, it draws our attention to issues of privacy and visibility as central themes in visual analysis. Studies of toilet graffiti, or 'latrinalia', provide another hint about how to approach graffiti – that is, to use it to look for differences between populations. Because toilets are usually single-sex environments, they provide a natural laboratory to explore how male and female cultures and communication styles might differ. In an early study Harold Loewenstine et al. (1982: 307) looked at restroom graffiti in a Midwestern American university. They found that women's inscriptions offered advice and considered issues such as love and marriage. Men were more interested in sex, politics and competition. There were also linguistic differences. Linguist Robin Lakoff (1975) argued that men were more likely to use direct, forceful language and expletives, while women were more likely to be indirect and polite. This theory was confirmed by the content of the graffiti.

The research project of Loewenstine et al., then, seems to confirm popular stereotypes and academic research about women, men and language. It is not alone in doing so. Numerous other studies since have found that men make graffiti to talk about sex and trade insults, while women offer advice. For example, over a period of time James Green (2003) systematically coded

graffiti in a New Zealand university library, comparing both male and female toilets with mixed-gender study booths. His quantitative results showed that female graffiti were polite and supportive, that of the men argumentative and filled with insults. Requests for homosexual acts were only found in the male toilets, as were racist remarks. By contrast, rape discussions (specifically 'what counts as rape?'), religious themes and personal advice were features of the female toilets. The study booths featured more humour but were otherwise unremarkable.

John Bates and Michael Martin (1980) offer a somewhat rare challenge to these sorts of findings. They collected graffiti from the men's and women's toilet stalls in restrooms at the University of Massachusetts and coded them into 16 categories. Contrary to their expectations, they found that most of the graffiti was located in the women's restrooms, that women provided most of the sexual graffiti, and wrote more graffiti with a homosexual content than men. Other studies have looked to graffiti as an unobtrusive measure of attitudes to homosexuality (Sechrest and Flores, 1969) and as a way of exploring sexual differences between women and men (Kinsey et al., 1953).

5.12 EXERCISE

University Restrooms

Estimated time required: 1–2 hours, plus travelling time if comparing different campuses/locations. This exercise should be done in pairs or small groups with at least one male and one female in order to gain access to both male and female toilets.

One way to account for divergent findings in restroom studies is to think about the kinds of institutions where they were undertaken. We might expect some institutions to be more progressive than others, or to attract 'alternative' students. On the face of it, it seems a plausible hypothesis that a Massachusetts university might be situated to the left of a Midwestern university in terms of the values of its students. Does your university conform to the findings of Loewenstine et al. or to those of Bates and Martin? Investigating this issue might provide you with some indication of whether your institution is traditional in terms of the gender order, or progressive. Select three or four toilets around the campus and transcribe the graffiti. Ideally these should be in matched pairs (e.g. male and female toilets on the same floor of the same building). Code the data into themes and look for gender differences.

Note: This assignment can be modified in various ways. (a) You could compare two or more institutions in your city (e.g. a university and a technical college). (b) You could look for cross-faculty differences (e.g. are engineers more progressive than women's studies students?). (c) You should conduct research with a partner of the opposite sex in order to avoid embarrassing or conflictual situations. (d) If your college is squeaky clean, then code the restrooms in neighbouring pubs and clubs.

Ethnographic studies of graffiti artists suggest that they have an elaborate sub-culture, with its own rules about style, materials and sources of prestige. This sub-culture also designates suitable locations for graffiti. According to Jeff Ferrell (1993: 76), graffiti artists tend to restrict their 'tagging' to areas which are previously dirty and unkempt. It is considered 'uncool' to mark a statue or sculpture (e.g. Balto is sacrosanct) or to work in an area which is already beautiful and well maintained, such as a park or attractive city square. Writers who desecrate such locations are liable to be sanctioned by their peers. For this reason graffiti tend to be concentrated in certain spots which have already been heavily worked, confirming the motto that 'graffiti attracts graffiti'. Such locations are typically characterized by urban decay. The artists see their work as beautifying such places, or at least as adding interest to them.

5.13 PROJECT

Global Graffiti

Estimated time required: 4+ hours depending on number of areas surveyed.

Ferrell's observations were made in the American city of Denver. We might question whether it has a wider applicability beyond the 'Mile High City'. If we are able to find supporting evidence for his proposition in other places and countries, this might suggest that graffiti writing has a shared global culture. Using a street plan downloaded from the Internet (e.g. Mapquest, Google Maps), mark out a small area of your city or town which includes both 'attractive' and 'rundown areas' in close proximity (e.g. shopping streets with back alleys or vacant blocks nearby). Systematically survey the streets and code the locations of graffiti and the number of items/size of coverage at each spot. If Ferrell's findings in Denver are generalizable, we should expect to identify (1) more graffiti in the depressed area and (2) more locations with clusters of graffiti than places with only single items, and (3) relatively low levels of graffiti on statues, in squares and parks.

Discussion: To what extent do your findings replicate Ferrell's argument? What kinds of exceptions and problems did you identify in conducting the project? Were there differences between types of graffiti and their locations, for example between 'serious' artists and casual scribblers? All things considered, does there indeed appear to be a global norm in the sub-culture?

Although graffiti are typically seen as a challenge or resistance to authority, sometimes they can take on a very different character. The breakwater at Nambucca Heads, New South Wales, provides a good example of this (see Figure 5.6). This sleepy seaside town is a popular venue for family holidays, usually in a caravan or tent. It has become a tradition for families to paint one of the boulders on the breakwater and to record the years of their visits. The semiotics of the graffiti is conservative, reflecting the importance of family,

tradition and community ties. In recent years religious and philosophical motifs have also become more popular. While your own area may not have a Nambucca Heads, there is likely to be some conservative graffiti around. City councils often provide materials for youth and other groups to construct murals and other pseudo-graffiti. Presumably they would withdraw support if the content offended public sensibilities.

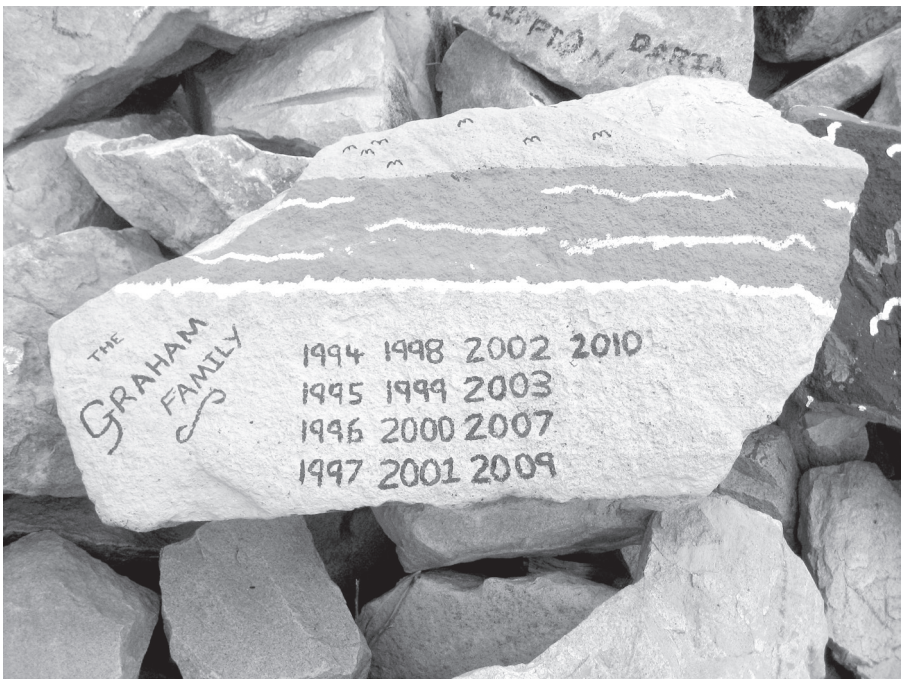


Figure 5.6a Figure 5.6(a–i) *Examples of 'conservative' graffiti at Nambucca Heads, New South Wales* (photos authors). Many visitors to Nambucca Heads leave messages on the breakwater boulders which extend for over 500 metres along the shoreline. We have been visiting this site periodically over the last 17 years or so and photographing the inscriptions on the boulders. These photographs were all taken on a visit in December 2011. Photos (a), (b) and (c) appear to be the work of regular visitors to the picturesque holiday destination. These messages reaffirm the values of the family and celebrate a sense of continuity with place over time with some families recording the year of each visit on the same stone. Photo (a) shows the message from the Graham family who have been visiting Nambucca Heads on a regular basis since 1994 with the last visit recorded as 2010. Note how the remaining space on this stone which could be used to record future visits has not been occupied by inscriptions from other visitors. Ideas about 'stall defence' discussed in Chapter 7 might help explain this. However, 'occupancy' of a particular boulder does appear to be finite in that if they are not 'renewed' after a given time then the boulder is deemed available for new messages. Similar inscriptions on boulders which we recorded in a visit in 1999 have now all disappeared.

(Continued)

Figure 5.6 *(Continued)*

Figure 5.6b

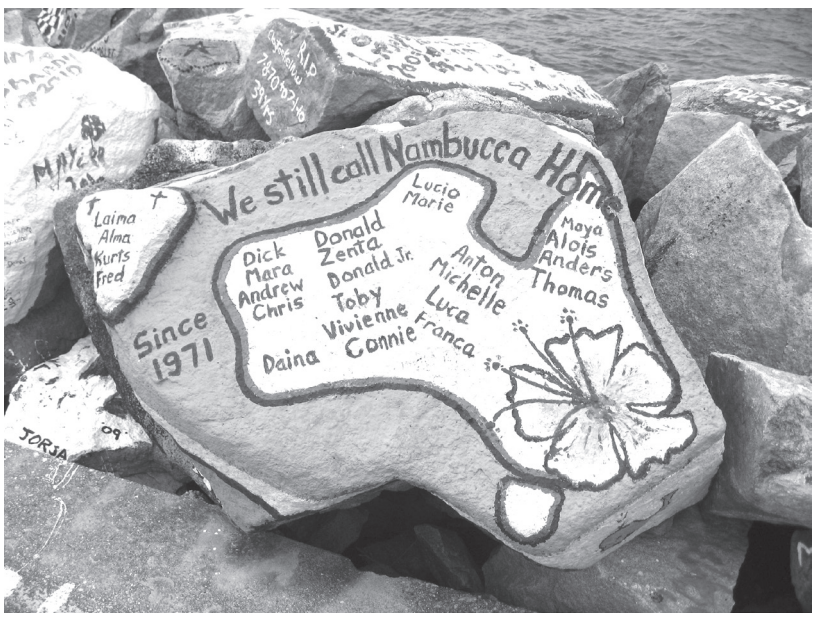


Figure 5.6c

Figure 5.6d

Figure 5.6e

(Continued)

Figure 5.6 *(Continued)*

Figure 5.6f A prominent theme in the images obtained in 2011 is the increasing number of messages from international visitors – see photos (d), (e) and (f). In photo (e) an Italian visitor – 'Bianca' – has celebrated her national identity with some lyrics from a well-known song by the popular artist Luciano Ligabue. The song recalls the sadness the singer experienced after the death of his father: 'I got over many things (in my life) but I can't get over you'.

Figure 5.6g

Figure 5.6h A visitor from Asia has offered a more philosophical musing in the inscription in photo (f). The message translates as 'When you climb higher you see further and widen your sights beyond what you can imagine in your dreams.'

(Continued)

Figure 5.6 *(Continued)*

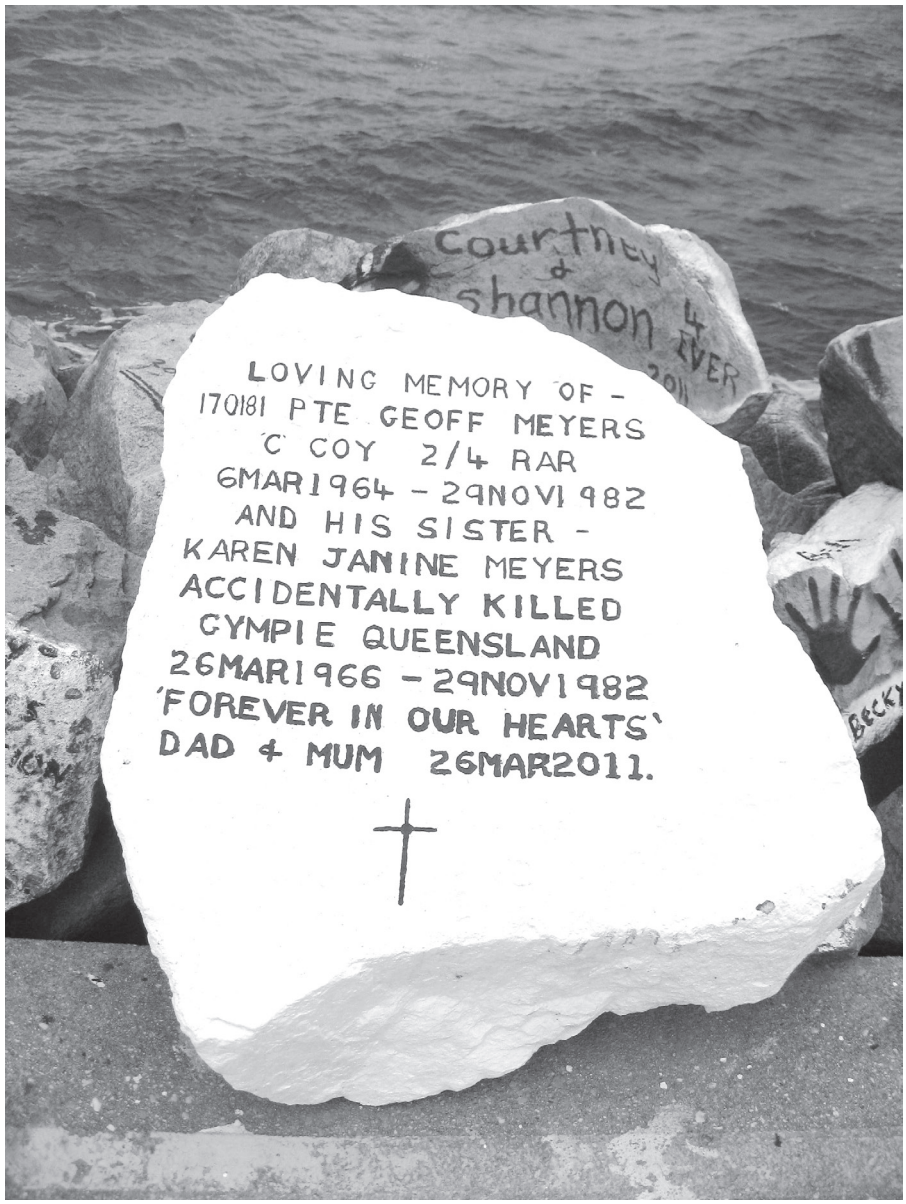


Figure 5.6i In our visit in 2011 we found that a new theme is making an appearance: the use of the boulders to commemorate the death of loved ones or significant biographical events: see photos (g), (h) and (i). In photo (h) a couple have celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary. The inscription has not been painted on the boulder but takes the form of an elaborate mosaic. Finally in photo (i) we see a boulder that closely approximates a gravestone. A mother and father have poignantly recalled the accidental deaths of their two adult children which occurred nearly three decades previously. We speculate that these 'sacred' inscriptions are likely to prove more enduring than the various 'profane' recordings of family holidays.

Vandalism and litter

The analysis of visual signs has for some years been a hot topic in the field of criminology and policing. Graffiti and vandalism are often lumped together as symbols of urban decay and as symbols of crime. Some people argue they are more than just a symbol, they are also a cause. According to scholars such as James Q. Wilson, George Kelling and Catherine Coles, minor signs of disorder, for example broken windows, are a visible sign that nobody cares (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Kelling and Coles, 1996). Such signs encourage crime, generating a vicious circle. The result has been a world-wide advocacy of 'zero-tolerance policing' in which minor misdemeanours are harshly punished so that streets are cleared of signs of disorder: squeegee bandits, loitering, skateboarders, graffiti, jay walking, and so on.

As supporting evidence for their theory, Wilson and Kelling (1982) cite a study by the psychologist Philip Zimbardo. He parked a car in the street with its hood up and the licence plates removed. It remained untouched for weeks until he smashed part of it with a sledgehammer. Within hours the car was stripped, turned upside down and destroyed. The implication seems to be that visual signs of disorder attract further disorder. It is possible to test the broken windows hypothesis in various ways without damaging public property. A group of students could purchase an old car or bicycle and try to replicate these experimental and observational studies. A more modest, if less spectacular, experimental project is described below.

5.14 PROJECT

The Litter Bug

Estimated time required: 2+ hours, divided into 6–8 sessions of approximately 20 minutes.

Does disorder breed disorder, as Wilson and Kelling claim? A cheap and relatively harmless way to find out is with litter. Select an area on campus or in your community that is not regularly cleaned up and count the amount of litter you find early in the morning. Return in the evening and recount. On another day, clear away the litter early in the morning and at intervals during the day to keep the site clean. If the broken windows hypothesis is correct, less rubbish should be deposited on the day that you do the regular clean-up than on an ordinary day (remember to include the rubbish you collect in your periodic clean-ups in calculating garbage totals). If you have time you can vary the study in subtle ways. Which kinds of rubbish act as the best stimulant to litter bugs? Newspapers? Fast food wrappers? Old household junk? Is there a linear correlation between the amount of rubbish at the start of the day and the amount at the end, or is the relationship more complex? With ethical clearance this project can be made more interesting. You can deposit rubbish yourself and see if you can provoke more littering.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have suggested a number of the ways that 3D objects can provide a rich form of visual data for sociological inquiry. We have argued that such objects can be 'decoded' and read in much the same ways as 2D texts. But we have also tried to do more than this. We have suggested they open up opportunities for a visual sociology which observes, describes and counts and makes deductions on the basis of these observations. As such the visual sociology of the 3D has a strong overlap with the literature on unobtrusive measures. The major advantages seem to be as follows:

1 In many cases, objects of material culture and traces can be used as objective measures of social process. They tap into 'actual behaviour, not reported or experimental approximations' (Rathje, 1979: 77). A physical trace or a material object is either present or not.
2 Objects and traces provide non-reactive and (often) unobtrusive measures. This has the advantage that the process of research is not confounded by respondents' behaviour changing once they know they are part of a study. Normal issues such as interviewer bias, providing socially preferred responses, etc., are avoided, unless we move on from the objects themselves to try to find out about their meanings.
3 Objects and traces are very often easy to quantity and classify, making comparative sociology and rigorous research design easy to conduct. This does not rule out interpretative sociology (decoding objects and their meanings), but it does add another string to the bow of the researcher.
4 Objects and traces are all around us. They provide a free source of data for the visual sociologist. All that is required is an active imagination which can work out how to mobilize them in a sociologically informed project and a pair of eyes to see them.

Having said this, it is important to record some of the limitations that this form of data has. Following Alan Kellehear (1993: 107), Webb et al. (1966), Sechrest and Phillips (1979) and Rathje (1979) and our own thoughts, we can identify several problems:

- The selective survival of materials. Some objects are more durable than others and will last longer. Some things will be considered to be of value and will be preserved in archives, others thrown away and destroyed. The result can be a biased material record. Determining just how biased is often no easy task. Consequently, little is understood about the sources of error in measures derived from unobtrusive measures.
- The material does not always tell us much about the population that uses it. While we can make strong inferences about populations in studies of graves and households, in other studies this is much more problematic. When looking at traces, for example, it is not always clear who left the marks. We might notice a groove on a stairwell, but was it formed by the action of men or women? And of what age? Graffiti writing is a semi-secret activity. We know what is said, but can rarely be certain just who is saying it. Here we may have to turn to the literature for information. Qualitative studies suggest most graffiti writers in the sub-culture are male and aged 15–24. We have to assume such people might have written the material we find in public spaces. But how

can we know this? And are these the same people who write graffiti in toilet stalls? To what extent is toilet graffiti the work of a vociferous minority rather than an index of the attitudes of the majority? Problems become even greater when we want to make inferences about attitudes, beliefs and values on the basis of 3D data. It might seem plausible to common sense that dull-coloured cars indicate conservative attitudes, but validating this sort of measure would require considerable resources.

- The use of unobtrusive measures can sometimes lead to banal and largely descriptive inferences that can make writing up difficult, especially for journal publication. That is, unless the hard data is complemented by further study using traditional reactive measures, or by a strong sociological imagination. The trick with the study of objects and traces is to find meaningful links to wider social theory. Otherwise, who (other than museum curators) cares if people like interactive museum exhibits, or have tourism souvenirs in their living rooms? One way round this problem is to begin with a hypothesis derived from a theory and then think about how this can be explored using visual data and direct observation. We have suggested some projects in this chapter which attempt to do this.
- Emic/etic problems. This common issue in qualitative research relates to the possibility of a disjunction between the researcher's understanding or interpretation of an object (the etic perspective) and the member's understanding (the emic). Often we can resolve these questions by talking to people who use objects, and learning about the values they place upon them – but sometimes intractable problems can remain. Due to our cultural studies training we might interpret a particular brand of German motor car as a status symbol, or as a marker of a phallocentric authoritarian personality, but its owner might see it simply as efficient, comfortable transportation with a good resale value. Who is wrong here, and who is right?
- In the study of traces, erosion and accretion, efforts at repair can obscure true levels of use. For example, over the years multiple attempts might have been made to repair a staircase, or carpets may have been put down to protect it. Such a process will make it difficult to detect true levels of use.
- Ethical problems to do with the invasion of privacy make some forms of unobtrusive research unattractive to some sociologists. It might be argued that garbage research, for example, involves snooping on people's private lives. When the study of objects takes a more open and explicit form these problems still persist. If we ask to enter someone's home and to talk to them about the meanings of the things they have there, are we not invading their privacy, even if they give informed consent?
- In many cases visual data is a relic of the past. It is not always clear to what extent this provides an accurate picture about the present. To give an example, universities often have portraits of former faculty members dotted around in lecture rooms, reception rooms, etc. These are almost invariably stuffy portraits of older, white men dressed in full academic regalia who are trying hard to look serious and knowledgeable. Is this data an accurate representation of *former* ideologies and sexisms in universities, or present-day ones?

Despite these limitations, the objects of our material culture deserve more attention than they have been given to date. We have suggested in this chapter some of their advantages relative to the 2D data that is the stock in trade of the visual researcher. The next chapter continues the move away from the 2D. We consider not objects, but rather entire settings. Our focus is on the places and spaces that we inhabit as members of our society. Like objects, these provide a data resource every bit as rich as the world of texts and images for researching the visual.

6

Lived Visual Data

This chapter will:

- Show how visual research can be conducted in the study of what Giddens calls the *locale,* a socially constructed and socially relevant space within which human interactions take place.
- Demonstrate how places and buildings tap into the cultures, values and ideologies in which they are situated.
- Suggest how observable movements of people in time and space can be used as indicators to answer sociologically informed questions.
- Point to the ways that issues of visibility and invisibility, privacy and publicness are often central to the organization of people, objects and activities in particular locales.
- Show how a number of locales such as museums, the home and the park offer fertile resources for research.

The previous chapter suggested some ways for visual research to move away from the study of the 2D image, towards the analysis of objects. This one continues the journey with a turn towards settings – what we call 'lived' visual data in so far as our lives are inevitably conducted in or 'lived', around and through material social spaces. Objects tend to be things with which people interact. Here we focus on the locations where people do their interacting. As the cultural geographer Rob Shields puts it, places like shopping malls, parks and streets are 'ensembles of objects' which 'are not artefacts in the traditional sense but are environments which, once entered, enfold and engulf us.' (1994: 203). When we study lived spaces, questions of motion, visibility and invisibility, and the patterning of zones, objects and activities, become central themes. In researching these we can use methodologies ranging from direct observation in naturalistic settings to the study of architects' drawings.

The chapter is organized into three sections. Firstly we look at efforts to decode places. The focus here is on the locale as a signifier that can be 'read'. Secondly, we explore how people respond to places, use them and move

through them. Thirdly, we examine some of the ways that visibility and invisibility are structured into built forms, influencing the arrangement of objects and human beings.

Decoding places

Museums, houses, shopping malls, offices, parks, streets and gardens are not simply functional structures whose built form reflects imperatives of utility and cost. They also reflect the cultural systems in which they are embedded. Sometimes we might read off grandiose political ideologies and complex systems of formal knowledge, but more often built forms simply display the 'common sense', tacit knowledge and deep cultural codes of a community. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the case of the ordinary home.

Everyday cultural codes: exploring the home and garden

Perhaps the most famous illustration of how we might decode a dwelling is Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) classic essay on the Kabyle house (the Kabyle are a peasant society inhabiting the mountains of Algeria, North Africa). This was informed by his anthropological fieldwork. Bourdieu studied the floor plan of a typical house, and linked it with his ethnographic knowledge of Kabyle life to demonstrate that the dwelling is structured by a number of binary oppositions. These link built form, gender roles, agricultural cycles, human reproduction and cosmology in complex ways. Bourdieu argues that 'the house is organised in accordance with a set of homologous oppositions – high: low:: light: dark:: day: night:: male: female:: fertilising: able to be fertilised' (1990: 275). These oppositions structure issues such as the placement of a loom, the storage positions of water and grain jars and the locations of activities like cooking, sleeping and sex. Grain kept for sowing, for example, is stored in the 'dark' and 'wet' part of the house. This is also where sex takes place. Women's activities are also associated with this part of the building – 'carrying water, wood, manure, for instance' (p. 274):

> The dark, nocturnal, lower part of the house, the place for things that are damp, green or raw – jars of water placed on the benches on either side of the stable entrance or next to the wall of darkness, wood, green fodder – and also the place for natural beings – oxen and cows, donkeys and mules – natural activities – sleep, sexual intercourse, childbirth, and also death – is opposed to the light-filled, noble, upper part. (p. 272)

Bourdieu explains that the dry, light, upper part of the house is associated with 'culture', with fire, and the transformation of nature. It is here that guests are received. This is the more 'male' part of the house, the part that is more associated with the public sphere. Bourdieu also argues that we can detect binary oppositions not only within the house, but also between the house and the world outside. Taken as a whole, the house is seen as the domain of women, while men belong outside in the fields. Men who spend too long in the house are liable to ridicule as a 'house man'. In sum Bourdieu's detailed decoding shows it to be an environment through which we can read the deep culture structures which pattern Kabyle life as a whole.

It does not take much sociological imagination to realize that the kind of approach taken by Bourdieu can also be applied to Western housing. In the cultural studies classic *Myths of Oz*, John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner (1987) decode the typical Australian suburban dwelling – in this case a showhome called the 'Rembrandt'. Entering the house they note that divisions between kinds of people are encoded into the built fabric. At the entrance:

> we are faced with a choice: left, right or straight ahead. To the left is the study and main bedroom – the most private area of the house. Even as viewers we don't turn left, so strong are the signals sent by the placing of walls and doorways. Straight ahead (with a further turn to the left) would be the family rooms – more private but not forbidden. To the right, following the natural curve initiated by our entrance is the 'living room' … The three directions in practice classify three different kinds of person: non-family (to the right), family (straight ahead) and marital couple (left). (Fiske et al. 1987: 33)

The built form of the Australian suburban house, then, encodes cultural distinctions about private and public space and about the family and sexuality in a way that is not fundamentally different from that of the Kabyle. Through visual and spatial cues, it works to channel outsiders into the more 'public' areas of the private dwelling. Gender ideologies can also be detected in the design. The open kitchen, they suggest, reflects the changing status of cooking. While in the past it was seen as invisible servants' work, today cooking is seen as 'creative' and the kitchen has higher visibility. While changing kitchen designs reflect changing expectations about women's roles,[1] in other areas the Rembrandt demonstrated that norms had not changed. The entrance to the laundry was invisible to guests. Fiske et al. conclude that washing is still seen as menial and not as creative.

Whilst Fiske et al. consider the spatial organization of a typical nuclear family household, Sue Heath and Elizabeth Cleaver (2004) undertook a similar investigation of shared household living arrangements among 18–35 year olds in the UK. Heath and Cleaver were particularly interested in how

[1]On this issue see also Mary Hasell and Frieda Peatross (1990).

members of such households managed the delicate balance between providing emotional cohesion and support for each other while maintaining some measure of individuality and personal privacy. Heath and Cleaver made detailed sketches of the shared living spaces but in addition they employed photo-elicitation techniques and asked their research participants to generate their own visual account of the routine operation of shared living which they were subsequently invited to comment on. Overall Heath and Cleaver found that there was considerable variation in the way that the 25 households they studied resolved tensions between individualism and collectivism and that the most 'successful' were those where the household members appeared more willing to tolerate each others' idiosyncratic tastes in decor and consumption.

In an earlier chapter we looked at David Halle's discussion of art in the home. His exploration of housing in working-class and middle-class areas of the New York region provides a third example of the ability of visual research to decode social and cultural values. Halle used architects' drawings and direct observation as his data. Firstly he looked at upper-class housing in Manhattan which had been constructed in the 1880s and 1890s. In this earlier period the front of the house was important. Elaborate staircases and ornate front doors were a signal of wealth to the passer-by. Backyards, by contrast, were small, dark and dirty according to available records and inferences that can be made from design. Halle shows that today this emphasis has been reversed. Backyards are prized for their privacy in the middle of the noisy city. Halle identifies two main types of garden. The contemplative garden is adult oriented. It is carefully designed (perhaps by professionals) and has plantings, and maybe a bench and a patio. Child-dominated gardens are found in households with young children. They typically have swings and other play equipment taking up much of the available room. Halle sees this trend towards the active use of the garden as a symptom of the suburbanization of urban life and as a reflection of idealized conceptions of nature and the 'country' that are now very powerful (as we saw in the previous chapter he also found these values embodied in art choices). Contrasting with the interest that residents took in the backyard was a comparative neglect of the front of the house. In over a third of the houses the grand staircase entry had been removed, with householders preferring to enter the house via what had once been the servants' door. Inside the house, areas which had once been occupied by live-in servants have been taken over for other uses. Formal reception rooms had also been appropriated for day-to-day living. Kitchen areas had been moved closer to dining areas, with many houses featuring combined kitchen/lounge/dining spaces. This reflected the decline of the paid 'downstairs' cook. 'Dens' were prized as indoor places for recreation and reflected the significance of intimacy to the nuclear family.

Similar trends were evident in the working-class Greenpoint area that Halle studied. Ornate exteriors were a feature of original designs, and

reflected a vigorous street-life. This has declined since the 1950s, with the advent of the automobile. This had made play and conversation in the street dangerous and unpleasant. By contrast, gardens at the back of the house (which had once been kitchen gardens) are highly developed as sanctuaries and as children's play areas. Inside the house, formal areas and rooms originally intended for borders had been taken over as extra bedrooms and the kitchen had merged with the dining/living room. Halle concludes that cultural change is encoded in build fabric. Privacy (from outsiders and also non-family members living in the house) has become more important over time, as has the nuclear family. These patterns cut across divisions of class and housing location. While Halle supplemented his inquiry with interviews and reference to historical materials, most of his findings were based on visual evidence alone. In his book he makes exemplary use of sketch maps to record the spatial characteristics of the houses and gardens he studies. Another point to think about is Halle's use of longitudinal data in the form of changing house design, both interior and exterior. This approach helps us to break away from common-sense thinking about the home and garden and to relativize our present-day perspective. The following assignment attempts something similar.

6.1 EXERCISE

Decoding and Rethinking the Home

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

The studies discussed above alert us to a number of themes that are built into housing and which can be decoded from them: (1) appropriate gender roles and their status, (2) degrees of public v. private places, (3) categories of person and places they belong, (4) uses of space. These can easily be explored using direct observations conducted in the home.

a Select a home that is known to you and construct a floor plan. Make notes on how the built form encapsulates established social values. You may be able to quantify some of these with a ruler. The most private areas of the house, for example, might be the furthest from the front door.

b Because concepts about gender, privacy, etc. are so deeply embedded in our common sense, it is a useful reflexive exercise to try to shatter these. Using another sheet of paper, redesign the home in a way that challenges these values and encourages new ways of thinking, alternative values and patterns of interaction. For example, you might wish to undertake your planning from a feminist perspective or from a polygamist perspective. You might also wish to break down the boundaries between the house and the street due to a more communitarian agenda.

c Consider which design is more 'practical'. To what extent do understandings of the 'normal' structure our belief that the conventional home is more practical? For example, are communal sleeping rooms only 'impractical' because of our established ideas about privacy?

Notes: A variation on part (a) of this project would involve a longitudinal design. It may be possible to locate floor plans covering a substantial time period. You may be able to find these in builders' advertisements in newspapers, for example, or in architectural history books, and of course the Internet is likely to have a variety of sites which may be useful. In theory it should be possible to trace changing norms over these plans. While these are 2D data, strictly speaking, they do provide an important resource for exploring built forms.

In a British context Sophie Chevalier (1998) looked at the garden much as Halle decoded the house. For her it is a 'mediator linked to the natural, social and cultural environment' (1998: 48). Visiting and mapping gardens, she identifies underlying cultural patterns and priorities. The back garden is a private/public space like the lounge – it is a private space, but one that visitors can expect to be allowed to enter. It is also, in many cases, a 'child-dominated play area' in which children's toys seem to take up much of the free space. Notwithstanding children, the garden can generally be decoded as a 'garden of delight'. It contains plants designed to give pleasure, rather than plants that are useful, and serves to express the identity of the occupants of the house. One might also find toys and ornaments, fountains and bird houses. Chevalier also indicates affinities between the lounge and the garden and the 'bridging' techniques that people use to unite them conceptually. Gardens might be transformed into a kind of outdoor lounge through the use of furniture and the lounge might be transformed into a kind of garden through the use of flowers or pictures of birds.

6.2 EXERCISE

Decoding Gardens

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

Get permission to visit a number of gardens belonging to houses in your area, perhaps those of your neighbours. To what extent are you able to identify cultural codes and patterns? Look for evidence of:

- Bridging between indoors and outdoors (e.g. garden furniture).
- Divisions between nature and culture within the garden (e.g. wild bushy parts v. formal lawns and borders).

(Continued)

(Continued)

- The kinds of uses that are made of the garden. Is it a 'garden of delight' or is it used for utilitarian purposes, such as the storage of bulky items, drying washing, or as an outdoor workshop? Are efforts made to hide these utilitarian activities?
- The labour that goes into maintaining or developing the garden.

Also, draw a sketch map of each garden, like the one in Figure 6.1 (below) and make notes. Refer to these later when writing up your results.

Note: To convert this exercise to a more significant project you may wish to sample systematically across some kind of social cleavage. Class and ethnicity stand out as two potential variables that might predict people having varying attitudes to their gardens. For example, former workers' cottages in a Greek-Australian area of Brisbane known as West End typically have their tiny gardens concreted over or covered in pebbles. Anglo-Australians in nearby streets, by contrast, keep scraps of grass and shrubbery. A shift towards vegetation might indicate assimilation away from a 'Santorini aesthetic'. In the case of class, one might predict more utilitarian garden uses among the poor (vehicle and boat storage, vegetable growing, dog pound), and a more elaborate 'garden of delight' approach among the affluent (water feature, exotic plants). However, the expanding middle-class interest in slow food and organic produce might be changing things in interesting ways.

The semiotic decoding activity we have suggested in the pages above privileges the reading of the expert who is on the outside looking in. Armed with a little critical distance from the everyday, we make 'strange' or arbitrary that which is familiar, exposing houses, hospitals and so forth as simply conventional arrangements of space. Another semiotic approach is to capture the meanings of places for the ordinary people who use them. There are various ways of doing this, including interviews and auto-photography. A more systematic method, one that is often used in marketing research, is to ask respondents to complete a chart with semantic differentials. This will include a range of contrasting terms such as friendly v. unfriendly, warm v. cold, or safe v. unsafe. Respondents might tick a box or put a mark on the page with these terms arranged in columns along the side. In this way we can see how people 'read' or 'interpret' particular architectures and rooms. Bryan Lawson (2001: 233) used this method to explore pub interiors, to work out the features of pubs that are successful and to offer landlords and breweries evaluations and pathways towards more inviting spaces. Importantly the method of semantic differentials can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of any given location and so to identify precise problems that need to be fixed.

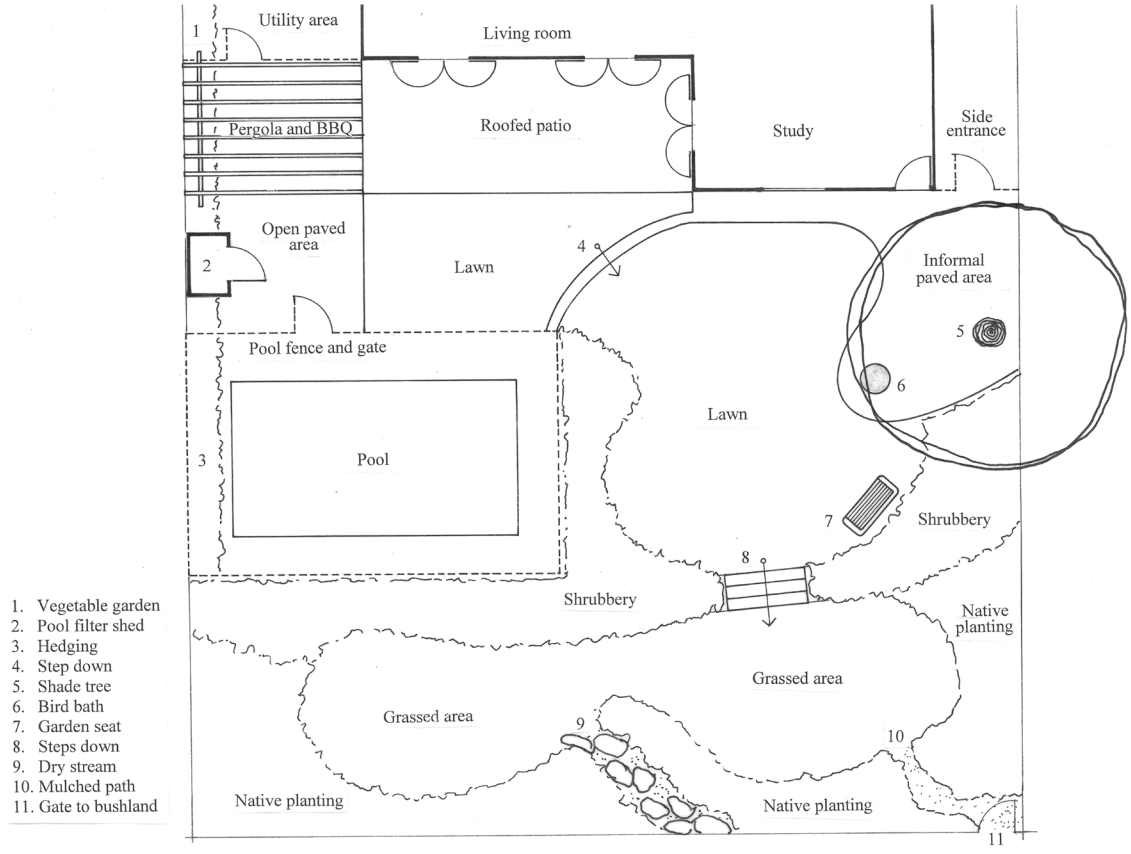


Figure 6.1 *Sketch plan of a typical Australian suburban garden layout.* Maps such as this can highlight taken-for-granted cultural patterns in the use of domestic space. Notice the transition from culture to nature as we move from the top left of the plan towards the bottom right. There is a progression from orderly, linear, built environments towards disordered, planted spaces and finally a gateway onto untamed bushland. Observe also the presence of a transitional zone consisting of lawn, informal paving, shrubbery, bench and steps mediating this shift.

Formal knowledge and institutional design

Moving on from the home, we find that planned institutions such as schools, hospitals and office blocks afford plenty of opportunity for investigation. In particular they permit us to look at the intersection of beliefs and discourses with built forms, especially in the case of longitudinal studies. Because the architecture of such places typically reflects forms of knowledge at the time they were constructed (rather than just the whim of individual architects), we can use the visual/spatial information encoded into buildings to trace shifts in expert knowledge. For this reason the French thinker Michel Foucault spent quite a lot of time looking at architecture. In his case the interest was in power. By showing changes in the design of hospitals, prisons and factories he was able to show how societal rationalization was leading to increased surveillance, hierarchy and classification. Each of these was a key component of control in modernity.

A study by Lindsay Prior (1998) on medical knowledge provides an illustration of this sort of methodology in action. Prior asserts that 'the spatial divisions which are expressed in buildings can be best understood in relation to the discursive practices which are disclosed in their interiors' (1998: 110). Using architects' plans as raw data, Prior discusses the way that the 'Pavilion' hospital of the nineteenth century was organized around the miasmic theory of disease. This held that disease arose from stagnant air and dark spaces. The circulation of air and light was said to be necessary to prevent illness. For this reason there were large spaces between beds in open, airy communal wards. Often there would be an outside veranda to which patients could be moved to facilitate the circulation of air. In the latter part of the nineteenth century the germ theory of disease became more widely accepted. The result was that operating rooms were removed from ordinary ward space. The open-plan ward of the Pavilion model was replaced by a new emphasis on separation and containment. Plans show that patients were to be enclosed in isolation cubicles, or separated by partitions. Windows were designed not to open so as to prevent the spread of germs – a dramatic U-turn from the ventilation orientation of the miasmic theory of disease. Later designs included more spaces for social interaction among patients and with guests. These reflected growing concerns about the debilitating qualities of formal institutions.

6.3 PROJECT

Institutions and Ideologies

Estimated time required: For a detailed project, allow at least a day to locate and analyse the data.

This project requires you to copy Lindsay Prior's methodology. Locate an architecture or design journal (or series of journals) in your college library. These will often include designs from exemplary or award-winning buildings. Select a class of institution and

try to find plans for this sort of institution over a time period. From the evidence on the plans, what can you conclude about:

- Changing discourses about care and control?
- The centrality and care of the body?
- Hierarchies and gender orders?
- Other interesting phenomena relevant to the type of institution?

Using library research, try to link your findings to the literature on the kind of institution you have selected. For example, if you have been looking at schools, explore the literature on child development. This will help you evaluate the kinds of inferences you made on the basis of the visual data alone.

John Pratt's (2002) discussion of prison design suggests that we can also use formal institutions to explore shifting cultural codes. Pratt notes that the prisons of the Victorian era were austere and forbidding in their architecture and served as warnings to the public. They also symbolized law and order. In more modern times they have moved out of town and tend to be hidden from view behind trees, embankments and other natural features. Pratt interprets this as evidence of the 'civilizing process' described by Norbert Elias. Over the past 150 years people have become more squeamish about the idea of punishment. They do not wish their neighbourhoods to be blighted by a symbol of evil, nor reminded visually of the realities of crime and suffering. The landscape architecture of the modern prison reflects this growing discomfort. Likewise Smith (2008) makes use of the architect's prospective drawing of London's Pentonville Prison 'in use' to explore the relationship of public life to prison life (we find similar fantasy drawings today when architects propose shopping malls, hotels and museums). The Pentonville image from 1844 shows genteel men, women and children strolling through the building and conversing. Smith concludes that Foucault's ideas about closed, hyper-rational institutions sealed off from public life do not hold. In this case we have the imagining of a 'purified space, an arcade for virtuous exercise and social intercourse' (Smith, 2008: 71). The overall impression we get from the drawing is of a penal system reaching out to the wider public, and of a public attitude to penal spaces that saw these as other than simply culturally polluted.

Visual methods can also work well when it comes to the ethnography of institutions and organization. In their study of a high-tech company Paddy O'Toole and Prisca Were (2009) made use of photographs, sketches and floor plans as adjuncts to the familiar ethnographic effort to understand workplace culture. Here the visual and material organization of space reflected cultural patterns. The Accounting Department area was meticulous, a 'haven of neatness and order' (2009: 623). Yet the Research and Development (R&D) space was seen to be 'crowded, untidy and bestrewn with objects and components' (p. 624). This reflected their anti-hierarchical, more anarchic and creative work environment and self-image. Meanwhile the Repair Department had

blocked off a door between themselves and R&D with some shelving. They were sick of having spare parts taken by R&D that they would need for their more orderly customer support role. Again a cultural difference could be read off from the spatial regime of the workplace. Here the evolution of separate departments and cultures in a rapidly growing company was documented in the visual record of social space and material culture.

Decoding public spaces

From homes to institutions we move on to public spaces. Locales such as shopping malls, streets and parks also offer material for the interpretative skills of the visual researcher. For example, they encode meanings about inclusion and exclusion, hierarchy and equality and ownership. This is most obviously the case when we look at shops and shopping streets. Such places are oriented towards display. As Fiske et al. (1987: 109) pointed out long ago, 'just as individuals construct their images within the similarity of fashion, so different shops construct their identity'. Working from within a critical perspective, Fiske et al. claim that 'class distinctions' can be identified in the semiotics of shops. The codes they identify run as follows:

- 'Democratic' shops have low-priced goods which everyone needs. Examples include dollar stores, newsagents, chemists and hardware stores. They have 'leaky boundaries' and do not bother with windows, often having open fronts with shutters. Goods are often displayed on the pavement in front of the shop as well as within it. Such shops do not really try very hard to mark their own identity as unique or exclusive. With their displays they signal that they are open to all.
- 'Middle-class' shops are exemplified by medium-price fashion outlets. Although there may be a few racks out in the street, such shops make extensive use of windows and window displays. Such displays are often crammed with goods. Interiors are well lit and can be seen through the window to contain large quantities of goods. The key semiotic here is plenitude.
- 'Upper-class' shops are, by self-definition, exclusive. Such shops might sell designer fashion and accessories or else valuable *objets d'art* – paintings, antiques, etc. Windows, display racks and shelves have fewer goods on them, signalling limited supply and scarcity value. Lighting is subdued, with individual items spotlighted like museum exhibits.

Fiske et al. suggest that such shops will often be spatially separated. In multistorey complexes the exclusive shops will tend to be located on the top floors. In city centres shops of a particular class will tend to cluster in particular streets. Exclusive shops, for example, are to be found in London's Bond Street and New York's Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue. Shields (1994: 205–206) reports a similar kind of stratification in the Rideau Centre, Ottawa. The lowest level of the mall has 'economy-minded' service stores, while on the upper levels we find 'high-end' jewellers, shoe stores and speciality clothing shops.

6.4 EXERCISE

Shop Styles

Estimated time required: Up to 2 hours.

Develop a checklist with features that key to the three semiotic codes identified by Fiske et al. Visit your local mall or city centre armed with a sketch map (you may be able to copy this from a 'You are here' board or download from the Internet). Mark on it shops which conform to the various semiotic codes identified by Fiske et al. Do you detect the kinds of clustering they predict? What kinds of factors might contribute to this? Think about the class structure of the client group for the shops. To what extent do class distinctions between the shops you study correspond to the semiotic codes identified by Fiske et al.? Remember that their data was collected in Australia. It is possible that cultural differences might generate a divergent set of cultural codes in another country. Are other cultural codes more important than 'class' styles in shaping shop semiotics? It is possible, for example, that ethnic or environmental themes play a larger role in some shops.

On this last point, Jerome Krase (2006; 2007) usefully notes that retail frontage can be used as a visible indicator of social demographics. Areas with strongly ethnic populations often signal this through the streetscape and in particular non-English-language signage. We can study this ethnic vernacular in order to read 'conflict, competition and dominance' (Krase, 2006: 74) in struggles to define the ownership and meaning of urban spaces. By taking non-artistic photographs at street level that replicate what the ordinary passer-by would see, Krase (2007) was able to build a resource with which to reflect upon this process when back in his office. Although Krase's use of photography is mostly illustrative, he notes that a more systematic project using photographic methods and/or archives might be developed in this way that takes the semiotics of the street and uses it to index demographic and economic shifts. Visual methods can also be used to record and assist the theorization of the process of gentrification in which high-status, higher income people come to replace the established, poorer residents of an urban area. Using photographs taken from the street Krase shows that ungentrified areas have a relatively direct or naive symbolic logic. As with Fiske et al.'s 'Democratic Code', retail establishments make it clear what they do or sell with window stickers and signage proclaiming that they are a butcher, a hair salon or a newsagents. Following Bourdieu, Krase suggests that gentrification makes use of codes of subtlety that signal high cultural capital. For example, his photographs document that it is often ambiguous what a store is up to until we get close to it. An arty coffee shop in Brooklyn, New York, simply has a sign saying 'BEAN' in the window. Without knowing what 'BEAN' is we would not be able to tell this is a coffee shop catering to the latte drinking classes. In such a way the area unobtrusively signals its distinction and its move away from ethnic and working-class identity.

Streetscapes can also document orientations towards the past. In Krakow, Poland, Krase notes that the city's post-socialist transformation into an

Figure 6.2(a, b) Ampelmännchen *in Berlin* (photos courtesy of Moritz Eyer)

international centre of culture has been signalled through store windows showing signs of elegance. These obliterate any history of communism and instead key the city to its Austro-Hungarian past by suggesting refinement and exclusivity. They look like shop windows from the upscale parts of Salzburg or Vienna. By contrast Dominik Bartmanski (2011) observes that post-communist streetscapes in places such as East Berlin and Warsaw often include iconic references to the recent past. The most famous example of this is the Ampelmännchen (literally 'traffic light men') of Berlin (see Figures 6.2a and 6.2b). Designed in East Germany and featuring a jaunty little man with a distinctive 'pork pie' hat, these were destined to be replaced with less charming figures under the unified Germany's programme of standardization. A subsequent campaign saw them saved. The Ampelmännchen now appear on various tourist and commercial items. Bartmanski argues that because they were apolitical the Ampelmännchen could serve as 'iconic bridges to the symbolically polluted past' (2011: 221) and so allow Berliners to join past and present through a visual language. Such studies suggest that stylistic codes of the street are closely related to national history and narrative. While Krakow's shops suggested the aspiration to move on from communism through a return to a golden age, Berlin's narrative was one where there was a desire to come to terms with a difficult past.

The use of public space

So far in this chapter we have suggested ways in which lived visual environments carry meanings that can be 'decoded'. The methodology here is not so very different from those used in the semiotic analysis of 2D materials. In what follows we wish to shift towards a less interpretative, more objectivist visual sociology of place. This approach with its focus on the unobtrusive observation of use has considerable overlap with the concerns of urban planners as they seek to design urban spaces 'that work'.

Making successful public places

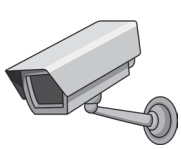
Of course meanings remain important with planners too. In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) famously argued that the physical attributes of public spaces provide visual and spatial clues which structure attributes of a public space to larger cultural or historical themes. Lynch suggested that in order to be effective a public space had to be *legible*. This means that it has to be decodable by ordinary people. After decoding they would be able to understand the place and the communal narratives that it taps into and also work out which kinds of behaviours are permitted and which are not. It would also avoid being

a boring 'non-place'. Often this legibility arises as the result of history and the gradual accretion of signs. An old fishing village, for example, might have the necessary boats, equipment and harbour to generate a distinctive sense of place without any conscious planning effort being expended on the task. This is because it really is a fishing village. Places like Trafalgar Square, the Champs-Elysées and Times Square, to pick some examples at random, also have established identities and connections to the public life of the city. For the most part planners need only retain the legibility that is already there.

In newer public spaces a sense of place might have to be constructed in more crafty ways through manipulating the visible and physical environment. In this section we draw largely on a well-known text intended for architects and planners (Carr et al., 1992, see also discussion of William H. Whyte below). Public spaces that work must fulfil a number of criteria, many of these visual:

- Firstly, as we have discussed, the place needs to mesh with local narratives and develop a symbolic identity. An example here might be a new waterfront development that uses motifs which play on its former identity as a dockland or harbour. There might be ropes rather than hand rails, and nautical-looking flagpoles.
- The second requirement of a place that 'works' is that it allows intended activities to take place and to signal their social acceptability. It has to provide comfort, relaxation, allow for both passive (e.g. people watching) and active (e.g. walking) engagement, and invite discovery through curving paths or the provision of viewpoints.
- The third requirement is that the space should provide people with a sense that they are welcome and safe. Evidence of use by 'undesirables' (often defined as the mentally ill, alcoholics, beggars and groups of youths) can lead to places developing negative meanings that discourage use by wide sections of the public. Notably what Carr et al. (1992: 144) call *visual access* to the public space is often vital in ensuring its appeal. This is the ability of potential users to see into the space from the outside. Public spaces surrounded by high fences, walls and hedges may deter users from entering because they have little information about the character of the place and its occupants.

It is ironic and interesting to note that according to this theory ordinary citizens are doing their own 'visual sociology' in selecting a public space. They are evaluating users, built forms and messages as they answer the question they pose to themselves: 'Shall I go there?' Planners, meanwhile, are anticipating this process and attempting to shape the answer by adjusting visual cues and information. They are trying to load the dice to get a 'Yes'.



6.6 PROJECT

Successful and Unsuccessful Public Spaces

Estimated time required: Up to 2 hours.

Select two contrasting public spaces in your town or city. Visit them and make notes. One of the spaces should be a place that is popular and the other a place that seems

neglected or forgotten. If possible, they should be sufficiently similar to permit meaningful comparison. Can you explain why these contrasting results have arisen? Look back to the discussion above and think about:

a The ability of the place to connect with local events, environment, history or people.
b The ability of the place to meet functional needs (e.g. play spaces, seating, shade).
c The ability of the place to appear welcoming and safe.

To what extent does the visual play a role in each of these? Think here about issues like, gaze, vistas, visibility, signs and semiotics. To what extent do the needs of other senses contribute to the overall success or failure of the public space? Think here about issues such as food and drink, exercise, toilets, noise. You might also want to fold in some of the ideas of William H. Whyte (below).

To back up your findings you might want to expand this exercise into a much more substantial project using the semantic differential method we introduced earlier in this chapter (p. 158). Have users of the space complete semantic differential evaluations of the space. What story emerges from your semantic differential charts? What do users of the failed space identify as priorities that should be fixed first? Does this agree with your own reading?

A variation on this exercise is to consider the success – or otherwise – of redevelopments of public spaces. In Brisbane, a recent redevelopment of the central square outside the City Hall, King George Square, was heavily criticized by the general public and continues to attract vociferous complaint. Previously, the 'square' was a rectangular space broken up by patches of grass and trees. It was a popular area for workers to sit and have a quick snack at lunchtime, or for families to rest under the shade of a tree after a visit to the City Hall Clock Tower. The redevelopment saw the removal of the trees and grass, replaced primarily by a large granite space. Locals complained that, unlike cities which might have historically required large spaces for military or ceremonial displays, Brisbane instead was a city with a tropical climate and a casual atmosphere, and the grass and trees provided a brief refuge from the surrounding city spaces – unlike the new open granite area which blazes under the midday sun. With the removal of the trees and grass, people are discouraged from using the space as much more than a thoroughfare.

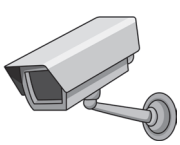
With this in mind, select an area in your city or locale which has undergone a recent redevelopment. It might be a park, a central area in a shopping precinct, or another public space. Consider and compare how the space was used prior to the development v. after the development. Does 'new' always mean 'successful'? Have the changes encouraged a different type of visitor or a different use of the space?

Some of the best work in this field is by the sociologist William H. Whyte. Working for the New York City Planning Commission in the 1970s, he made a systematic study of public spaces and human activities using video cameras, notebooks and other modes of observation. Armed with this information he was able to suggest designs for public spaces that assisted human flows, built use and generated social interaction. Whyte's classic film *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* can generally be found on the Internet and it offers a quick introduction to his research logic. The film is very much

worth watching for its demonstration of many of the techniques of visual research we have been recommending in this book, for example code sheets showing where people are sitting, mapping features, counting flows through spaces, time lapse photography and comparative case selection. Whyte showed that patterns of use were incredibly stable over time. Yet he remained puzzled that some open spaces and plazas have lots of social life, while others fail and are empty. He explored what made a difference by coding features in 15 different plazas. His findings include:

- People attract people. People like to watch people and to be in busy settings.
- Heavy pedestrian flows improve possibilities for chance encounters with friends and colleagues. Places with the heaviest flow generate the most impromptu conversations.
- People are attracted to edges, steps and trees and these provide places to gather and talk, not large open spaces.
- People do not like spaces that are not easily accessible from the street when they are raised or sunken. Rather the street and the plaza or park should be in dialogue.
- His most important finding was that people sit where there are places to sit. These people attract others. Benches cause socially awkward situations related to ownership, sharing and forced intimacy (see the discussion of stall defence in Chapter 7). Better are steps, the sides of raised flowerbeds and the raised edges of pools and fountains. Here everybody feels entitled to a certain amount of linear space. Seating should be slightly set back from 'the action' but not removed from it.

These findings from what is essentially observational research have been hugely influential in shaping planning policy around the world. They show that simple visual methods can yield significant and surprising results. One of Whyte's most interesting techniques was the use of time lapse photography to track where people sat at the Seagram Plaza in New York. He was able to trace movement following the sun and assess how far apart people liked to sit as well as evaluate the relative popularity of various spaces within the plaza. We refer to Whyte again briefly in the next chapter (p. 194–195) and present two photographic examples of contrasting seating designs for urban spaces which encourage different forms of public patronage. Readers may wish to examine these illustrations and our discussion of them before attempting the following exercise.



6.6 PROJECT

Time Lapse Photography of Public Spaces

Estimated time required: At least a day – most of this time will be in taking the photographs and then downloading and arranging them for viewing.

In the days of film, time lapse photography used to be an expensive proposition. Today this is a viable method for every visual researcher. Select a public space of

interest. Locate a good viewpoint. This is likely to be a high point such as a window overlooking the space or a nearby rooftop. Using a digital camera fixed to a tripod take a photograph every few minutes. After downloading the images to your computer run them as a slideshow. This technique offers a way to objectify street life and detect patterns in seating and other uses of space. What are you able to conclude? Is the space efficiently used or only parts of it? Are certain times of day neglected? What planning changes would you suggest?

Note: A variation here can be to use a video camera and to run that footage at very high speed. Video footage is particularly useful for locating problems with flow, these arising from criss-crossing lines of pedestrian travel or insufficient entrances and exits to the space. What changes would you suggest to improve the pedestrian experience?

How people move through spaces

Our last suggested research exercise brought us to the interesting question of how people navigate public spaces. There is a surprisingly extensive literature dealing with this theme, much of it theoretical and revolving around the concept of the *flâneur*. This originated in the work of French poet Charles Baudelaire and has since been adopted and critiqued by theorists as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Richard Sennett and Mike Featherstone. The *flâneur* is an urbane urban spectator, wandering the streets at will in search of spectacle and amusement armed with a certain sense of ironic distance. The belief that such movement was an expression of freedom reached its peak with Guy Debord's (1958) idea of the *derivée*, a kind of drifting movement in which one goes around the city from situation to situation, going with the flow. Debord saw such a form of motion as a refusal of the rationality and ordered control characteristic of life in capitalist modernity. Fredric Jameson's (1993) famous work on postmodern architecture suggested that such competencies might become futile in the future. Jameson's point is that possibilities for the critical and autonomous *flâneur* are radically circumscribed. Due to the allegedly disorienting properties of postmodern buildings such as the Bonaventure Hotel, individuals no longer have the capacity to perceptually or physically navigate spaces but are subordinated to them. Such a rich theoretical legacy sets the scene for empirical and sociological, rather than metaphysical, ideological and phenomenological, approaches to human and crowd movements. We suggest that such a topic belongs to visual analysis for two reasons. Firstly, human movements are directly observable, and therefore are available to visual methods of inquiry. Secondly, visibility and responses to visual cues play a central role in directing such movements and controlling human behaviour. Consider the case of the museum.

Movement, flow and narrative: the case of the museum

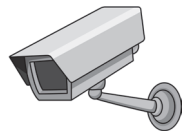
Designers of museum exhibits are often very conscious of the movement of people. This may be because they wish to avoid jams, but is more often because they wish to structure a learning experience. Skilful museum planners use a number of findings about human movement to good effect. Their science essentially suggests that people can be manipulated to move in particular ways. According to David Dean, an experienced museum director and academic, there are a number of 'shared behavioural tendencies' that people have which are modified by societal or cultural preferences. Dean argues that 'to create effects, move people and attract attention it is normally wiser to play upon natural tendencies rather than oppose them' (1994: 51). Many of these human preferences seem to be based on visual and spatial perceptions that people have. Dean claims that:

- If all other factors are equal, people will turn to the right.
- People tend to stick to the right wall, ignoring exhibits to the left of their line of movement.
- The first exhibit on the right side will receive more attention than the first one on the left.
- People tend to spend more time at displays located at the start of an exhibit than towards the end.
- People dislike entering areas without visible exits.
- More time is spent on exhibits that line the path along the shortest route between the entrance and exit of an exhibit.
- Just as (Western) people read from top left to bottom right, they will also scan exhibits in this pattern.
- People tend to be drawn to brighter and larger objects.
- People have an average attention span of about 30 minutes in an exhibit.

Sometimes museums need to work against rather than with the grain. There may be spatial or educational reasons why visitors cannot turn right or need to enter a room with no visible exits that would otherwise be dead space. Hence Dean also suggests various strategies that museum planners can use to shape exhibits and head off those habitual patterns of action. These include:

- Using barriers to force people to turn left on entry.
- Promoting movement in 'unnatural' directions through the use of light, colour and other gimmicks.
- Getting people to look at displays of 'dull' and 'boring' but scientifically important things that they feel the public should know about (e.g. shards of old pottery, bones) by using dramatic lighting effects.
- Generating curiosity or a sense of mystery that will encourage people to circulate or explore out-of-the-way spaces. This can be done through light, design and sound.

6.7 EXERCISE



Museum Behaviour

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

Are Dean's findings valid? Visit your local museum and make predictions about which exhibits in a particular room will be more popular according to his criteria. Now record people's movements in the selected exhibition. You can do this either by tracking people around the complex, or by sitting in a room and making notes. Do people seem to have other behavioural patterns that the list above does not cover? Think about ways of quantifying your data. For example, record the comparative amount of time spent at exhibits you have previously coded as 'dull' and 'bright'. What do your findings suggest about *flaneurie* in museums? Are people really just drifting around taking pleasure, or are their movements controlled by design? What advice would you give to the curator as a consequence of your analysis?

If you feel highly motivated perhaps e-mail or interview the curator of the exhibit to raise any questions you might have or to confirm your reading of the space.

In the previous chapter we looked at the ways that a museum display might encode a process or 'story' like human evolution through the arrangement of artefacts in a case. Such a process can operate at a more macro level too, shaping the movements of the human through space. An important factor in determining the layout and design of a museum exhibit is the total 'narrative' message of the display (Dean, 1994: 55). Unstructured approaches are common where there is no specific story being told. This might be found in an art gallery. A given room might display painting by 'impressionists', treating them as a school with common properties. In such a location floor plans tend to be open, and human movement discretionary. 'Directed' approaches to human movement are found in displays with a stronger story line. These might document the chronology of a phenomenon, like the evolution of stone tools or the development of Monet's style during his career. Here we can expect to find a floor plan which pushes the reader from earlier to later stages, rather as a Christian pilgrim visits the 12 stations of the cross that tell the story of the crucifixion. An alternative scenario might involve a display on something technical, where earlier exhibits introduce fundamentals and later exhibits introduce finer detail that cannot be understood without a grasp of the fundamentals. An exhibit on Monet's techniques and materials or on atomic power might follow such a pattern. The following two diagrams (Figure 6.3) illustrate the kinds of human traffic flow one might expect to find in each setting.

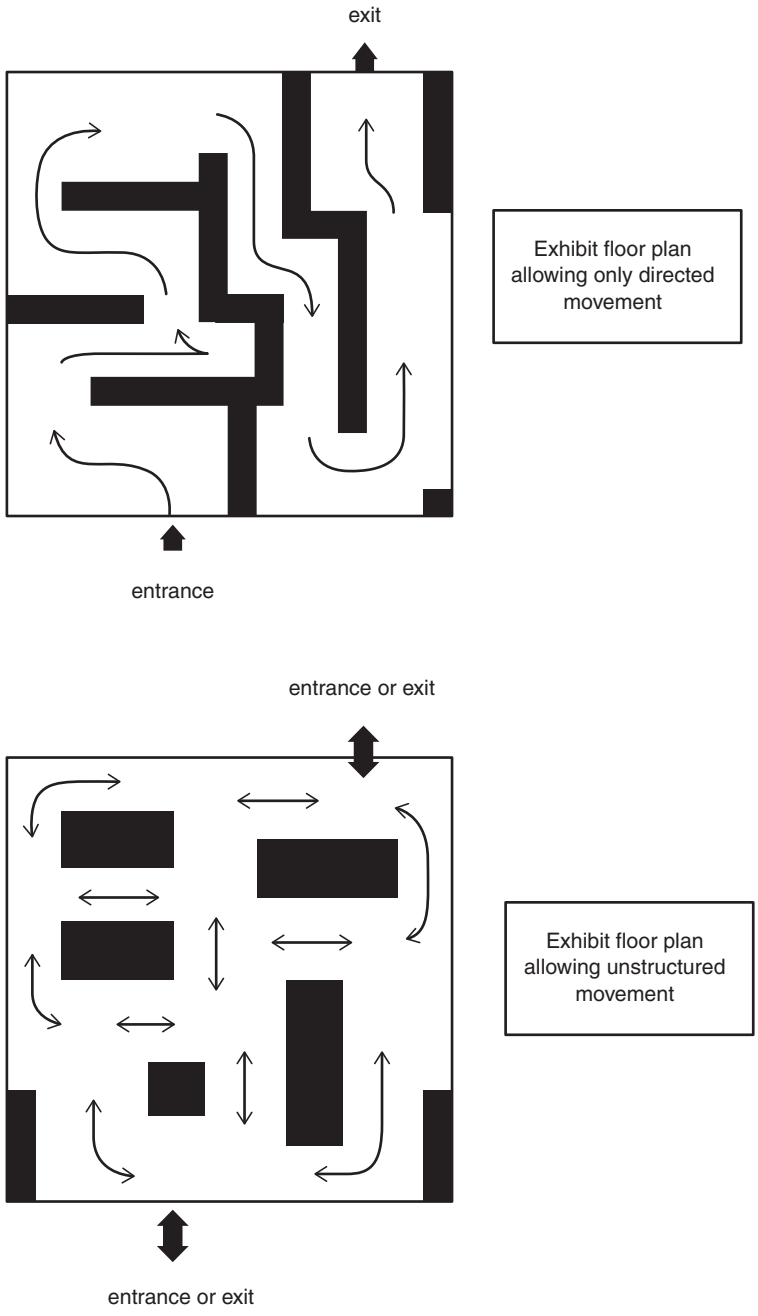
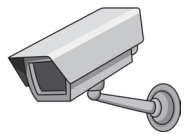


Figure 6.3 *Unstructured and directed human traffic flows in a museum* (adapted from Dean, 1994: 54)

6.8 EXERCISE



Museum Traffic Flow

Estimate time required: Up to 2 hours.

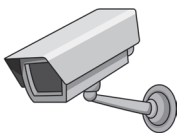
Visit a museum and select one or more exhibits that seem to have a strong narrative theme. What is the narrative being told by the exhibit? How is this embodied in the floor plan? Sketch the floor plan and indicate with arrows and labels how the various components of the narrative are arranged spatially within the exhibit. How effective is the floor plan in carrying out its mission? Observe human movements through the exhibit to evaluate whether the narrative is working. Think about developing a coding sheet in which you note, using numbers, the sequence in which exhibits are viewed by various visitors. What is and is not working? What would you advise the curator to do to fix any problems you see?

Purposive versus hedonistic movement: the case of shopping

The distinction between directed v. less structured movement can also be explored in other lived environments. For example, while virtual shopping is an increasingly viable option for most people, shopping still has a kinaesthetic dimension: it is 'about moving in the city, malls and shops, that is, in a space that makes purchasing possible and where the openness and plurality of possibilities are fundamental' (Lehtonen and Maenpaa, 1997: 143). Lehtonen and Maenpaa (1997: 144) distinguish two ideal types of shopper. One kind sees shopping as a 'necessary maintenance activity'. For these people it is a means to an end, where time is viewed as scarce, where shopping is an everyday routine and where planning and discipline are involved. The other kind of shopping is pleasure oriented. Here shopping is an end in itself, a fun activity for spending time and seen as being an escape from everyday life. In this latter kind of activity one need not actually make any purchases to have a good shopping trip! The pleasure of shopping comes in part from looking at goods, trying them on, walking around the mall and experiencing its atmosphere, seeing and being seen – essentially in sensual *flaneurie*. Of course shopping can also provide social opportunities for meeting friends and spending time with them. This is especially the case for cash-strapped groups like teenagers.

A similar distinction in shopping styles is made by Colin Campbell (1997), who argues on the basis of a focus group study that these distinctive shopping styles are gendered. According to Campbell the analysis of his transcripts suggests that 'male view of shopping is, in essence, one in which a "need" is identified, an appropriate retail outlet is visited, and a suitable item purchased,

after which the shopper returns home' (1997: 169). Males, then, tend to be time conscious and to see shopping as a work-type activity that needs to be completed efficiently and quickly. By contrast women are interested in browsing and refer to 'the pleasure to be had in "just looking around"' and to 'refer to shopping in terms which suggests that a fundamentally aesthetic and expressive gratification is involved' (p. 170). Women see shopping as a form of leisure and are also more likely to take advantage of the parallel opportunities provided to enjoy coffee, movies and social experiences offered by the mall. Such work offers simple options for visual sociology.



6.9 PROJECT

Gender and Shopping Styles

Estimated time required: As a detailed project, including ethics assessments, literature review, selection of sites, preparation of coding sheets, coding of data and analysis, allow a minimum of a day's work. The actual time will depend on whether you complete one or all of the suggestions below, and how rigorous your coding is.

This project could be scaled down by working in groups and discussing the results in class.

Here we suggest three ways of exploring gendered shopping styles and seeing if the orthodoxy holds up:

1 Trail men and women around the mall from the moment they enter the door (see note below). This is a standard technique in commercially sponsored shopping anthropology. Using a prepared map of the mall, mark their route and keep a record of where they are every five minutes by placing a mark on the map. Analyse the maps. If theory is correct we should expect that men's routes will be more direct than women's and involve less back-tracking. They should also spend less total time in the mall.
2 Position yourself by an entrance and make a note of the number of men and women entering the mall. Work out the proportion of each sex. Now visit areas of the mall that offer non-shopping experiences such as coffee shops, food halls and movie theatres. Count the number of men and women in each location. If theory is correct, it will be found that women are over-represented in these places. This project has fewer ethical issues – see note below.
3 Position yourself in a location with a good view of a stretch of mall corridor (e.g. on a balcony looking down). Using a stopwatch, time how long it takes men and women to cover the stretch between two identifiable points (e.g. shop fronts, rubbish bins, plant pots). If theory is correct, men will cover the distance more rapidly due to their purposeful, time-efficient shopping style and desire to leave the mall as soon as possible.

Notes: (1) You might want or need to obtain permission from mall management to conduct these studies. The first one in particular might attract the attention of store security or may spook the customer into thinking you are a stalker. We would strongly

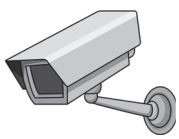
suggest ethical clearance here, even though this method is commonly used by commercial organizations. The second two are more unobtrusive and should be easier to carry out. (2) You may locate interesting differences according to the day of the week. Weekends, for example, are socially defined as leisure time. You might find a trend towards the leisure-shopping pattern at this time. (3) Aside from gender, age and race, offer other demographics along which you can structure your study.

Another approach to shopping centre movements is to explore questions of architectural design and flow, much as we looked at questions of flow in the museum. Shopping centre managements like to build multi-storey malls as this maximizes the amount of retail space they can place on a given area of land. A problem, however, can be to get customers to circulate to the upper levels of the mall. Various devices can be established to attempt to do this. These include the use of glass and light to draw people upwards, locating up-escalators in more visible places than down-escalators, and (the more risky strategy of) locating anchor attractions on these floors, such as food courts. Basement areas can also be a problem.

Postmodernism, disorientation and confused movement

One of the most substantial claims about postmodern spaces is that they exert a disorienting effect on people. Fredric Jameson's influential thesis is that such places embody the spatial and cultural logic of late capitalism. They engender confusion that prevents contemporary subjects from understanding the totality of the situation in which they find themselves. While people might be able to navigate the grid-like streets of a modernist city like New York, they find themselves perplexed when dealing with a multi-level, 'postmodern' space with curves and blind alleys etc. Jameson's own evidence for this finding was his personal experience of being lost in the Los Angeles Bonaventure Hotel. Although from a methodological perspective one might find this evidence inadequate, his claim has often been repeated as a fact by leading sociological scholars. Shields (1994: 206), for example, writes that contemporary shopping malls 'enfold and engulf us in their interior spatial logic' and that they have the power to 'guide but also deny human will … on terms prescribed by the designers, display artists and operators of the shopping centre'. According to Shields, the architecture of labyrinthine passages and stairways and escalators moving in directions opposite to those we wish make it difficult for people to engage in rational, planned movement through the mall. Consequently we are forced to become a *flaneur*, moving with the flow of people whether we like it or not. Theorists often go on to suggest that confusion leads to consumption.

Such ideas have come under scrutiny. Peter Jackson and Nigel Thrift (1995: 210), for example, assert that the 'residual influence of Marxian political economy' in the study of malls has led to a rather one-sided picture of the mall as 'an essentially threatening presence, able to bend consumers to its will'. They suggest that more research should focus on the active role of consumers in negotiating meanings and lines of action in the mall. The work of John Manzo (2005) in Canada offers support for this view. Using observational sociology and some photography, he shows how mall users improvise lines of action that might be unauthorized or not predicted by designers. He is especially interested in the food court area. Here uniform seating, bright lighting, small tables and a lack of privacy are visual cues that discourage lengthy stays and encourage fast eating. The idea is to turn people around and to send them back to retail areas to consume. However, in the food courts he studied, ethnic minority old-timers from Italy and the Azores established their own corners and played cards, essentially converting the food court into a coffee shop. Regular customers would often nurse a beverage after they had completed eating, thus extending their stay. People would establish a personal space using a coat or book to reserve a table (see 'stall defence' in Chapter 7) in effect making a spatial claim on anonymous public property. Manzo was not specifically concerned with movement, but one can see how this sort of observational inquiry into personal behaviour in planned environments can be extended to explore the relationship between design, autonomy and trajectory. Indeed, shopping malls provide an excellent location for a thorough test of generic claims about postmodern spaces and their ability to overwhelm the human subject. The following project taps into this opportunity.



6.10 PROJECT

Disorientation in the Mall

Estimated time required: Although the actual work time may be only 1–2 hours, this project suggests that you revisit the malls at different times and days of the week. This will add to the overall time for the project.

In a project we conducted (Woodward et al., 2000) shoppers were surveyed in three malls, ranging in style from the mildly postmodern to the highly postmodern. The less postmodern malls were essentially older, linear malls which had had some postmodern features bolted on to them. Shoppers were asked questions about feelings of confusion and the need to consult store maps. The results showed remarkably little difference between the malls, with people quickly learning layouts and plans so that, after a few repeat visits, they were no longer disoriented in the postmodern malls.

Such a methodology, of course, has little to do with visual research. Yet, it should be possible to replicate this study with little difficulty using purely observational methods. Sit near to the mall maps and note how often they were consulted at the various malls. If the postmodernists are correct there should be marked differences between consultation patterns in the two kinds of mall. Obviously you will have to think about visiting each mall at various days of the week etc. so as to capture the full range of mall users. The advantage of this method over Woodward et al.'s is that you are using a non-reactive observational measure. As we have argued earlier in this book, these are an advantage of visual sociology. Your findings should not be influenced by normative responding, nor by faulty recall, nor by variations in the ways that respondents interpret survey questions and scales.

Visibility, invisibility and the gaze

In previous chapters we have touched on issues of vision, visibility and invisibility. In the chapter on objects, for example, we spoke about the contrast between hidden objects and those which are displayed in public. In concluding this chapter we return to this set of issues as they are fundamental to the organization of social life in built environments.

Panopticon spaces

Foucault's (1979) work on spaces and disciplinary practices is perhaps the most cited when it comes to research on visibility and social control. Central to his work were ideas of surveillance and the ways that this surveillance caused people to regulate their behaviour within repressive institutions. Foucault drew attention to a Victorian-era architectural device known as the panopticon. This consisted of a central tower with an invisible guard, around which various cells were arrayed. People in the cells could never be certain if they were being watched or not. As a result they would have to constantly monitor and check their behaviour, conform to institutional rules, and so on. Foucault argues that the principles of the panopticon have become widespread in our society as a technique of social control. Evidence for this can be seen in the proliferation of security cameras in shopping malls, high streets and even universities like ours.

Surveillance and design

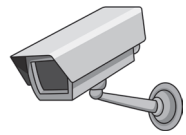
One way to explore themes of surveillance is to look at plans and designs and the way these change over time. For example, Prior (1988) studied the design history of the asylum. He shows that early asylums embodied the

kind of disciplinary architecture Foucault discusses. Inmates are enclosed and separated from the outside world, and were separated from each other in cells located in wings, while functionaries work in the 'hub' of the panopticon design. There is more to the design than simply panopticism. Prior suggests that the stress placed on the individual cell reflects 'a desire to emphasise the individuality of the occupant, and a desire to control the occupant' (1988: 102). In other words, there was a tendency in the prevailing discourses to treat the inmate as an individual, rather than as a member of a class of people with a common problem. Other features of designs also catch Prior's attention. On the plans he sees 'bathrooms, day rooms, airing grounds, wash-houses, bed-rooms' which 'spell out in some detail the elements of a culture in which the body and its functions are closely regulated' (p. 105). In addition, one can decode an obsession with hierarchy from the plans, with supervisors given more room than keepers, and so on. Looking at more recent designs, Prior comments that as madness came to be seen as more like an illness, asylum designs have come to resemble hospital designs more than prisons. Moreover, contemporary designs incorporate spaces for social workers and occupational therapists. This again reflects changing discourses about madness and how it intersects with the interests of various professions.

Effective and ineffectual surveillance

Panoptical surveillance is widespread in our society. For example, there are thousands of CCTV cameras in every major city. This proliferation is controversial. Many contemporary critics argue that we are living in a 'surveillance society', and that this is dangerous for civil liberties. Another line of attack is to suggest that such cameras are ineffective as crime deterrents. Despite the hype, they have never caught a terrorist with much touted 'face recognition software'. Moreover, many people have developed ways of subverting them. The tendency of young people to wear hoodies and protestors to wear V for Vendetta masks is a case in point. We might also point to the innovative abilities of people to locate secret spaces for illicit activities. Goffman's (1961) study of asylums suggested that even inmates of a closed institution could find secret places that were relatively immune from staff supervision. Here they would engage in smoking, drinking and gambling. Goffman's findings may be applicable more widely to surveillance in public locations and lend themselves particularly well to a visual sociology making use of unobtrusive measure.

6.11 PROJECT



The Panopticon Shopping Mall

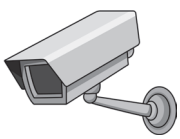
Estimated time required: For a more informal observation activity, allow up to 2 hours. For a more detailed project, including quantitative measurements or qualitative categorizing, allow up to a day to plan, observe and analyse your data.

Visit your local shopping mall, city centre or other public space. What forms of surveillance can you detect (e.g. security cameras, guards)? When you have worked out what forms of surveillance are in operation, classify areas of the shopping mall according to whether they are high, medium or low surveillance. The next thing to do is to collect data on deviance. Itemize visual evidence of deviance (e.g. graffiti, litter, drug needles, used condoms) for each of these areas. To supplement this project, you might also want to conduct visual observation of some of these areas. Look for 'deviant' activities such as skateboarding, or groups of young people hanging out. You can write up the study in either a quantitative or qualitative way. If taking the quantitative path, think about scoring the evidence and constructing a scale for the amount of deviance (e.g. item of litter = 1, graffiti = 3, drug needle = 5). Do your findings tend to support Foucault's views about the power of surveillance, or Goffman's about the ability of people to find creative ways to avoid it? If you wish to be a planner or security consultant, what practical modifications to the surveillance regime of the setting can you suggest?

Mutual surveillance in institutional settings

Behaviours in public places are strongly regulated not only by norms, but also by issues of visibility and invisibility. The panopticon need not be a camera operated by people in authority, but can also arise from self-policing of populations due to mutual visibility. To illustrate this theme, let us return to one of our favourite sites for visual sociology – the museum. Writing about the nineteenth century, Tony Bennett argues that 'the museum explicitly targeted the popular body as an object for reform, doing so through a variety of routines and technologies requiring a shift in the norms of bodily comportment' (1995: 100). The intention was that the working classes (and other less refined groups) might become more cultivated not only by studying the exhibits, but also through genteel promenading in a civilizing environment. The implicit contrast was with the street, the pub and the fair, where licentious and boisterous behaviour was predominant. The problem for museum managers was to enforce new norms of behaviour without having to employ

armies of guards. The solution lay in internal architectures in which the public's view of themselves came to be as significant as the public's view of the exhibits. New museum designs had open galleries and halls, replacing and eliminating small rooms and dark corners. Because the public were constantly visible in galleries to themselves, they came to self-regulate, 'thus placing an architectural restraint on any incipient tendency to rowdiness' (1995: 101). Bennett sees this technique as being consistent with Foucault's work on surveillance, with the gaze being used as a normalizing device to discipline the unruly body.



6.12 PROJECT

Visibility and Behaviour

Estimated time required: 3 hours to 1 day.

Visit your local museum, yet again. Note down areas where levels of mutual public visibility are high and areas where they are low. Areas of high visibility might include galleries and walkways. Areas of low visibility might include dead-end rooms, less visited locations on the top floors, and places that are kept dark for dramatic effect or to protect the displays. Using observational techniques, code examples of less formal modes of behaviour such as laughter, touching, joking, kissing, running, slouching, etc. You will probably need to keep a tally of the number of people passing through each location so that you can express your 'unruly' behaviours as rates. In this way you can control for the potential effects of the less visible locations being less visited. Do you notice significant differences in comportment in these areas? Do your findings support Bennett's ideas about public-to-public visibility leading to civil conduct?

Note: One reason you might experience problems in conducting the project above is that, as we have discussed, today museums are trying to jazz up their image and encourage signs of life in their visitors. You can easily modify the project by making an evaluation of whether these strategies work as the central plank of your research. Discussions with museum management might help to clarify the intention of various exhibits and the kinds of public behaviours that are to be expected or tolerated in each location. You can then look to see if reality conforms to expectation. School trips generally make for especially high levels of deviance and these can offer a strategic research opportunity.

Kinds of gaze

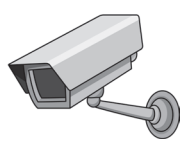
Environments are not simply places where we see things in a passive way. They are also locations where we must look in active ways. In an earlier chapter we looked at the ways that advertisements and other texts encourage particular kinds of gaze. Sexist advertisements, for example, may encourage a 'male gaze' of an objectified female body or else some kind of aspirational female gaze: 'I'd like to look like that'. Environments can be coded in much

the same way to encourage particular kinds of looking. Using post-structural language, we can argue that places work to anchor different kinds of 'scopic regimes'. Pasi Falk (1997) suggests some of the ways that this can take place. Both the chapel and the shop work to halt the moving body and pull it away from the flow of the street. Yet there are differences. The chapel, he argues, 'promotes a kind of inward meditative look as an aspect of a peace-seeking mind, while the shop invites a more extroverted and active look' (1997: 179). The art gallery is like the shop in that it is organized to stimulate the active gaze. However, in the case of the art gallery the gaze is directed in such a way as to maintain distance, while in the shop it may 'lead to close encounters and the use of contact senses. Thus the shopping gaze is reminiscent of the approaching gaze of the hunter' (p. 182).

Fiske et al. (1987) provide some further indications of the kinds of fundamental ways that the gaze structures shops and shopping. They assert that shopping is structured around the 'pleasure of looking'. It is a spectacle in which one is both performer and spectator. Fiske et al. point to the extensive use of 'glass, light and reflective surfaces' which turn window shopping into a 'stroll through a hall of mirrors' (p. 98). They also point to the omnipresence of places for looking, like balconies, where shoppers can gaze at the passing parade. In combination these stimulate consumption by making people more aware of their bodies, identity and image. Narcissism, voyeurism and identity formation come together in complex ways in the shopping experience

Naturally people do not always gaze in the normative way. Shields (1994: 221), for example, argues along similar lines to Fiske et al. that malls work to direct the gaze towards objects, oneself and others and to stimulate consumption. Yet he also points out that such gazes may take deviant forms as people make use of the opportunities that the mall presents. Men, for example, may use the plethora of glass and escalators for voyeuristic looking, while children might count bald heads from a balcony or take an interest in rubbish on the floor.

6.13 EXERCISE



Places and Gazes

Estimated time required: As an in-class discussion activity, this will take between 30 minutes and 1 hour. If you add in the observational studies suggested, then the time to allocate to this exercise will increase accordingly.

This is a small exercise to get you thinking about the gaze and the ways it is encouraged and shaped. Select two contrasting locations where looking is a major activity. Tourist spots, sports grounds, strip clubs, casinos and hair salons, for example, are all organized spatially and in terms of mood to encourage particular kinds of looking.

(Continued)

(Continued)

What kind of gaze is encouraged at your locations? Is it active or passive? Public or hidden? How does the architecture and design of the location encourage a particular gaze? Conduct some observational studies. To what extent do people engage in the gaze that is being encouraged?

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explored various dimensions through which places can provide a resource for the visual researcher. We have looked at how they can be decoded, at ways in which they are looked at and used (or fail to generate use), and at ways in which people move around them. Towards the end of the chapter, vision, gaze, civility and behaviour in public places came to the fore as essential themes for understanding relationships between people and environments. The next chapter builds on these issues but in a new direction. In this chapter our concern was with the ways that built forms influence human action and human movements. In Chapter 7 our attention shifts to consider how interaction with other humans, and their visual availability to us, influences how we behave. This area of interpersonal interaction is, in many ways, far more complex and methodologically challenging.

7

Living Forms of Visual Data

This chapter will:

- Introduce theoretical perspectives through which visual research can look at people and bodies in mutual interaction.
- Explore questions of gaze, territoriality, gesture and presentation of self in public life.
- Look at how people organize themselves in space, signal to each other and deal with non-verbal communication in everyday life.

In this chapter we extend our investigation of visual data to embrace what is arguably its most ubiquitous but least self-evident manifestation: the activities of people in everyday interaction. Our focus here is in particular relations among strangers. In previous chapters we have explored the issue of people interacting with spaces and inert objects, as well as the ways that questions of sociological relevance can be addressed by exploring movements and behaviours. Things become more complex when we explore how people react in relation to each other. Social life is very much a play of embodied signs through which people display identity, status and competence as well as an awareness of the rules of social life themselves. Such displays allow social life to go on 'as usual' and in an efficient, self-organizing way. Because the production and reception of signals is generally in the visual register (exceptions are things like smell and, of course, language) the study of persons in interaction is very much amenable to visual inquiry. Every day each person gives off hundreds of signals that are intended to be read. As visual researchers all that is required is that we attend to these signals in theoretically and methodologically disciplined ways.

The study of the ways humans utilize or orient to space in their everyday interaction is a specialized area of investigation and is referred to as proxemics; closely related is the field of kinesics or communication through

gesture and body language. While these are both highly technical fields that increasingly have come to involve the use of video recording technologies and even laboratory techniques to capture fleeting micro-expressions and embodied gestures, we present here many examples of the ways that a low-tech observational study can ask and answer interesting questions.

For most sociologists Erving Goffman's voluminous writings (e.g. Goffman, 1963; 1971) on behaviour in public settings are probably the best examples of sociological work that takes the minutiae of everyday conduct among strangers seriously. Yet Georg Simmel was probably the first major sociologist to comment on anonymous public life as a pivotal feature of modernity. In his essay on 'Sociology of the senses' Simmel (1908) drew attention to the fact that most shallow interaction is based on sight rather than sound:

> Social life in the large city as compared with the towns shows a great preponderance of occasions to *see* rather than *hear* people … Before the appearances of omnibuses, railroads, and street cars in the nineteenth century, men were not in a situation where for periods of minutes or hours they could or must look at each other without talking to one another. Modern social life increases in ever growing degree the role of visual impression … and must place social attitudes and feelings upon an entirely changed basis. (Simmel 1921 [1908]: 360–361, emphasis in original)

But just how is social life organized in terms of 'visual impression' in this world marked by close but generally fleeting contact with strangers? How do people manage 'attitudes and feelings' in such an environment?

Goffman's 'civil inattention' and the ways this is transcended

One of Goffman's earliest and most fertile concepts was forged with the explicit aim of answering such questions. When persons are mutually present in a public place but not otherwise interactionally engaged Goffman suggests that there are particular norms operating which regulate the kind of eye contact deemed permissible between individuals. Specifically we accord other parties 'civil inattention', a process which involves giving the other a sign that we have noticed them, yet at the same time showing that we are not particularly interested in them. Goffman notes the role of a glance that is followed by looking down or away, which he calls a 'kind of dimming of the lights' (1963: 84). This is a brilliant observation, yet Carol Gardner has observed that we do not always get the full package. The simple act of walking past another person may also involve activities 'that are not breaches of civil inattention but constitute mere markers of the act' (Gardner, 1980: 329). Women are particularly liable to receive such paralinguistic signs of their presence. These communicative markers can range from such things as mechanical noises – a truck driver noisily applying air brakes as his vehicle keeps pace with a female pedestrian, or youths who jingle bicycle bells as a rhythmic accompaniment to a walker – to physiological signals

such as belches or nose blowing as well as more elaborate activities which appear more contrived or intentional. Gardner offers the following description:

> A young white father wheeling his child in a stroller looks up and down at the young woman crossing Fifth Avenue opposite him. Eight feet away from her he gives stroller and child an extra push and lets go – no hands: – and with one of his free hands he begins patting his thigh and, at the same time, begins to whistle continuing both activities until he and the woman have passed. Other men rhythmically tap some object at hand – a walking cane, a magazine, a gallery program … These types of markers of passage thus salute civil inattention by obeying its boundaries and simultaneously undermine it by incorporating attention-getters such as gaze and noise into those boundaries. (1980: 331)

Gardner's example draws attention not only to the presence of tokenistic markers that deny full interactional equality, but also to Goffman's relative insensitivity to issues of gender in the public domain. Leaving this issue aside for the time being, we note that more overt linguistic breaches of civil inattention are also to be found. For example, where there is some obvious similarity between two passers-by – persons with children of the same age or dogs the same breed – then there is a licence both to give and receive remarks. Gardner also mentions situations when, for whatever reason, we exit the role of a properly comported citizen and we become an 'open person' (Goffman, 1963: 126) and liable to comments from passers-by. On these occasions we may be anxious ourselves to proffer reasons or extenuating circumstances for the discrepant appearance. People en route to a fancy-dress party by foot or transporting unusual objects, such as large items of furniture, from one location to another are examples of this. Such people offer visual cues to interaction. They invite or permit others to exit the civil inattention ritual.

7.1 EXERCISE

Being an 'Open Person'

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes.

It should be relatively simple to investigate being an 'open person'.
Develop an experiment where you first walk down a reasonably busy street as a normal, anonymous citizen. This is the 'control'. Next travel the same street in fancy dress or carrying an unusual, large or comic object. Be careful not to initiate interaction yourself, but rather let members of the public approach you as an 'open person'. Note the reactions you receive after each run (e.g. duration of eye contact, smiles or jokes) or perhaps dictate these reactions to a recording device as you go and tally the results later. With variations on this method you should be able to investigate various things. For example, is there a threshold effect whereby just wearing a hat is not enough, but a full costume suddenly invites interaction? What is more powerful, a large object being moved for some ostensible purpose (e.g. sofa) or a smaller comic one (e.g. inflatable banana or toy animal)?

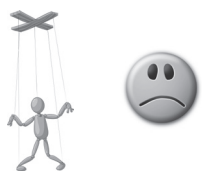
Goffman appears to assume that civil inattention operates as a universal norm governing all forms of public contact between strangers[1] or unacquainted individuals, at least in contemporary Western societies. But this is not actually the case. On the contrary there are recurring situations in which contact between passers-by appears to be governed by what we might term a norm of *civil attention* – the inverse of Goffman's category – when *not* to speak or openly engage with the other party constitutes a breach of pedestrian etiquette. For example, consider the sort of contact that takes place between citizens who pass each other on the walking or jogging tracks which have become a conspicuous feature of many suburbs of large cities, as well between more serious hikers on remote back-country trails. In such contexts walkers appear duty bound to explicitly acknowledge fellow exercisers, especially as the density of foot traffic drops off. The encounter assumes the following form. As two walkers (or walking parties) approach each other on a track, something like the typical norm of civil inattention appears to operate until a space of about 3 metres separates them. That is, the walkers momentarily monitor each other, adjusting their positions in readiness for passing. As the gap between them narrows eye contact is deliberately engaged and greetings, typically verbal but occasionally gestural, are exchanged as the parties pass. In Brisbane, it is common for up to 20 such greetings to be given to one of the authors of this book during a simple early-morning stroll. We speculate that such greetings might be a way of mutually acknowledging the 'worthiness' of each other. That is, the person is recognized as someone 'who has made an effort' or 'got out of bed early'. Walking tracks are frequently busy as early as 5.00 am in Brisbane: in the summer months it is light by then and people take advantage of this – and the relative coolness at this time of day – to exercise before heading off to work.

A classic study conducted some years ago by Murray Melbin has some potential bearing on this phenomenon. Melbin (1978) postulated that in contemporary times the night time had become a new frontier. More specifically he argued that just as the process of land settlement displayed spatial colonization so the tendency for humans to spend an increasing number of hours during the night awake and active represented the colonization of time. But even more intriguingly he hypothesized that if this was the case then perhaps the behavioural norms which operated in the land frontier might also be found operating at night. In order to investigate this he devised a number of small-scale experiments to see whether the norms of helpfulness and friendliness which had historically been identified with frontier life could also be found in the night time. For example, were there any differences in how people responded to requests for directions or when approached to answer surveys at different times of the day? Was there any evidence that shoppers and clerks at supermarket checkout counters engaged in more sociable forms of contact during the nighttime opening hours? Melbin's research is doubly interesting in that his

[1]See Stefan Hirschauer (2005) for a more recent analysis of civil inattention and the sociology of the stranger.

hypothesized behavioural norms run counter to our typical understandings of night-time conduct. That is, we generally regard the hours of darkness as a more threatening time when people would be reluctant or even afraid to engage with strangers. In fact Melbin's research demonstrated that this was not the case: his experiments supported his prediction 'that night-time is a period of more helpfulness and friendliness than other portions of the day' (1978: 17).

7.2 PROJECT



Temporal Differences in Civil Attention

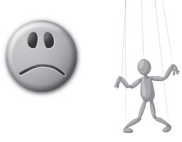
Estimated time required: Allow a whole day just for data collection if you plan to complete this project in its entirety. Preparation and analysis will need to be added to this time frame.

Building on Melbin's research, it would interesting to explore whether the incidence of civil attention we have earlier associated with walkers who meet in the early mornings occurs at other times of the day. Although a direct replication of Melbin's research design is not possible – recreational walkers appear to be active only during the daylight hours[2] – there are still a sufficient number of hours of daylight to explore variations in the kind of behaviour we have identified. If, as we have suggested, the mandatory greetings which appear to be exchanged between early-morning walkers is a function of the perceived worthiness of the activity at that time of the day, then do walkers who meet later in the day when the activity carries less sense of disciplining of the self feel compelled to acknowledge each others' presence? Or is it the case that a situation more like civil inattention and the aversion of the gaze comes into play? Moreover, what about the contending hypothesis that it is simply the volume of foot traffic that determines the applicable norm?

To explore these rival hypotheses you would need to systematically assume the role of a recreational walker over the entire span of daylight hours. For example, walks could be undertaken at two-hour intervals from earliest light until dusk and the degree or kind of contact exchanged recorded. It would be possible to quantify this in an elementary way: a verbal greeting representing the full civil attention end of the spectrum could be scored 2; a gestural greeting 1; and the aversion of eye contact at the moment of passing representing civil inattention, 0. Also tally the number of people you pass. As in all such experiments the design of the research would be enhanced by incorporating other variables such as gender, age and locale. Is there more evidence of same-sex greeting behaviour – that is, civil attention – between walkers regardless of the time of the day that they meet? Other factors could be introduced into the research design: for example, you could try roller-blading instead of walking and see whether this has any impact on previously established patterns of contact, or you might take along a pet dog with you.

[2]Goffman alludes to an additional factor which may be operative when people meet during the night time and which can affect the occurrence of contact between them. He refers to 'the tack occasionally taken by a man passing a strange woman at night on a narrow isolated walk: instead of conspicuously according the female civil inattention, the man may proffer a fleeting word to show that, unlike a would-be assailant, he is willing to be identified' (Goffman, 1963: 128).

The prior project ended with a discussion of the role of pets. The part that they can play in transforming civil inattention into what Goffman called 'focussed interaction' has been explored in a paper by Douglas Robins et al. (1991). They looked at how new dogs and owners became part of a friendship group. Initially there was a period of 'unfocused interaction' in which the existing pet owners and the newcomer engaged in mutual observation. Robins et al. found that it was the regulars who initiated verbal contact and this was typically done by addressing the dog rather than the owner: for example, remarks such as 'you're so cute', 'you're friendly aren't you?'. Initiating contact with a stranger carries the potential for loss of 'face' if such contact is not reciprocated in the expected manner and by addressing the dog first this minimizes any potential embarrassment. The dog thus serves as a 'bridging device' (Goffman, 1963: 126) or a conduit between the two humans. Ann Cain (1983) has coined the term 'triangling' to refer to this process of pet owners directing remarks to each other through the medium of their animals. A period of small talk between the owners then followed, this being limited to dog-related matters. Subsequently the new owner would be invited to unleash his or her dog so that it could join the other dogs already at play. If the dog 'passed' this initiation test, that is if it demonstrated that it was not aggressive with the other animals, then the new owner embarked upon a period of 'probationary membership' (p. 13) with the group. In this phase, although conversations with the other dog owners became more extensive they were still largely restricted to dog-related matters. Finally the newcomer becomes identified as a regular and conversational topics become more varied and intimate. In Robins et al.'s case this occurred after a period of about five weeks had elapsed. An indicator of this final status is revealed when the newcomer him- or herself – rather than the pet – is greeted by the other members of the group on arrival at the park and their return anticipated in the closing salutations exchanged after each exercise period. Aside from facilitating interaction, dogs can have other uses too. Michael Ramirez (2006) noted that dogs were used as props to demonstrate or perform gendered identities. Men were more likely to engage in vigorous exercise with their pets, seeing themselves as a 'coach' and the dog as a 'training partner'. Women saw themselves more as a 'parent' or 'carer' and acted accordingly.



7.3 EXERCISE

Pet-Facilitated Interaction

Estimated time required: For each suggested activity, up to 1 hour.

1 Accompanied by your dog (or a borrowed one if necessary) hang out in your local park. Does the interaction pattern detected by Robins et al. prevail? How long does it take before people speak directly to you? Are you first approached by a dog

owner of the same breed as yours? Robins et al. found a strong boundary to exist between dog owners and non-owners. Do non-owners speak to you as well? How can you account for the similarities/differences with Robins et al.'s findings?
Note: You might be able to modify this project in various ways. Try using a weird pet like a snake or rat. Do people still want to talk to you? What does this suggest about the role of animal symbolism and anthropomorphic potential in mediating breaches of civil inattention?

2 Simply hang out at a local park where people take their dogs. Develop a coding sheet. Do gendered patterns of human–animal interaction exist as predicted by Ramirez?

The activities and projects we have been suggesting looking at civil inattention and the visual ordering of face-to-face social interaction have a long history in low-budget social science. Cities are often held to be impersonal or unfriendly places where people remain anonymous – although this latter point has also been cited as an advantage of city living. Is this really true when it comes to stranger interaction? Two classic studies which employed visual techniques as part of their research design are relevant here. In one, Joseph Newman and Clark McCauley (1977) undertook an investigation on the rates of eye contact between strangers. Male and female experimenters were positioned outside the front door of a centrally located building such as a post office or a store in three different locales – a city, a suburban area and a small town – and were instructed to attempt to make eye contact with everyone entering the door. The results showed that eye contact with strangers in the central city was relatively rare (an overall success rate of 15%), more common in the suburb (45%), and most frequent of all in the small town (75%). Moreover, the rate of eye contact did not appear to vary with the sex of the experimenter or on the interaction between the sex of the experimenter and the subject.

In contrast Richard Wright (1989) reports the results of a 'friendly student exercise' which came to opposing conclusions with regard to the sociability of rural settings. Wright describes his exercise as an attempt to 'debunk the folk wisdom that the bucolic world is predominantly personal and intimate' (1989: 485). In his research he requested students, enrolled in an introductory sociology class at the rural-based university where he teaches, to approach strangers and to attempt to initiate interaction with them using an innocuous greeting or a casual remark about the weather. Students were advised to work in pairs: one undertook the attempted interaction and noted the verbal component of the stranger's response while the second student observed the interaction from a distance and took note of any non-verbal component such as body language and facial expression. To minimize any suggestions of sexual interest, students only approached same-gender strangers. The strangers' responses generally fell into one of four types. Most common was what Wright categorizes as 'mistaken identity'. Here the stranger's response indicated that the student had mistaken them for someone he or she knew and the stranger then rapidly withdrew from the encounter. A second type of response was 'Your face is

familiar, but I can't place your name.' Here the stranger indicated that he or she was at fault in not being able to reciprocate the initial greeting. A third response was classified as 'insults and irritation'; in content these were somewhat similar to the responses which Garfinkel observed in his ethnomethodological breaching experiments (Garfinkel, 1967). Finally, but least likely of all, were 'friendly' responses by the stranger involving the acceptance of the greeting and the development of the encounter through further conversation.

Lofland and anonymous interaction in the city

Although she rarely cites Simmel, Lyn Lofland in *A World of Strangers* (1973) takes a rather Simmelian line in suggesting that the modern city, in contrast to the village, provides an environment characterized largely by the constant interactions of strangers. The social order of the city requires individuals to skilfully negotiate their way through settings. Lofland's classic study most famously analyses two common situations in which urbanites might find themselves – movement from one public space to another and waiting behaviour. The 'entrance sequence' refers to movement from an outdoor to an indoor environment – say from the street to an office or hotel reception area. The entrance sequence runs as follows. Typically the citizen will check his or her appearance and arrange his or her clothing and hair just outside the door. Physical needs may also be attended to at this time like belching, scratching and coughing. Upon entering the setting the citizen has to read a barrage of visual signals about interior layout, people, and so on. Pausing can provide an opportunity to do this, but at the same time it can make one the object of scrutiny by others. The entry is usually a place of high visibility where people do not like to linger. According to Lofland the most common strategy is to keep moving straight ahead, but also to scan rapidly with the eyes so as to take information on board. Another is to justify a pause with some delaying tactic, like removing sunglasses or a hat. Alternately the individual may avoid taking a complete reading by focusing single-mindedly on one aspect of the environment, such as a news-stand in a railway station, and heading towards that goal. The full environment can be surveyed after reaching the stand or purchasing a magazine. Some people just follow others so as to get away from the entrance area quickly or look only at the floor and feet and navigate in that way. The aim of all people entering a setting, however, is to find an inconspicuous position where they can stop or attain a goal (e.g. a ticket queue) where their place in the setting is justified. Simply standing around near an entrance is not a legitimate social role.

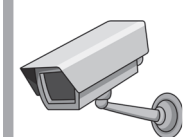
Waiting provides a similar problem in that 'the trick is to sustain one's inconspicuousness and to continue to make very clear that one is not open for interaction' (Lofland, 1973: 146–147). In a Goffmanesque way, Lofland identifies three major 'styles' through which this is accomplished. The *sweet young thing* is assumed primarily by young women. This involves having a very correct posture,

sitting still and 'reading' a book or magazine. These combine to signal that one is a respectable person. The reading material, however, is rarely read. Instead it is scanned, with much attention being spent on reading the environment for danger. This is attained without risking eye contact. When she moves away from her place of rest, she will move purposefully rather than strolling. *Nesters* tend to have large numbers of items of personal property which they spend time arranging and caring for. They arrange these around themselves and spend a lot of time in body movement as they fiddle with them. They will be constantly delving into bags, reading and folding newspapers, counting change, moving their bags around, and so on. Involvement with these props gives the nesters an excuse to avoid eye contact and signals visually that they are too busy to be approached for possible interaction. According to Lofland, young men and middle-aged women are most likely to be nesters. *Investigators* spend a lot of time exploring the inanimate objects of the setting. They might look at the contents of vending machines, read signs, timetables and brochures, and study the architecture. Investigators are primarily men from the age of 30 upwards.

Lofland's work is not without its controversial aspects. Like much of Goffman's work it seems to assume that urban dwellers have high levels of fear and anxiety and that the city is an urban jungle full of stranger danger. Yet many people are relaxed and confident and outgoing. Her writing also seems out of step with contemporary gender norms. Some might say that the 'sweet young thing' is a patronizing term. Furthermore, technological changes mean that most people now carry mobile telephones or iPods which can also be used to manage the waiting period – but does their use represent new waiting 'styles' or variations on the original categories? The next project suggests a way of testing whether or not Lofland's generalizations are still correct.

7.4 EXERCISE

Entering and Waiting Behaviour



Estimated time required: As a brief exercise, up to 1 hour per activity. Also allow about 30 minutes to develop your coding sheet. As a more detailed project, some of our students have done excellent work – and gained new insights into their local community – by completing this task as a major assignment. Allow time for ethics assessment, brief literature review, selection of sites, construction of coding sheets, coding of data and analysis. The size of sample and depth of analysis required will be as instructed by the teacher.

Observational studies of stranger interaction like Goffman's and Lofland's are full of fascinating insights. Yet they are also contestable. As you might expect having read this far in *Researching the Visual,* we would suggest that one way to put such studies

(Continued)

(Continued)

on a firmer empirical footing is via efforts at quantification which allow stronger inferences to be made about the social distribution of various interactional strategies. The following two exercises suggest ways that this can be done:

1 Select a suitable public space such as a waiting room, bus depot or railway station. Observe the entrance sequences or waiting behaviours of men and women. Using a code sheet, code activities like preparatory grooming and pausing as well as observable social characteristics of the people, such as gender and age. Do you detect any significant differences?
2 Observe entrance or waiting behaviours in two environments. One should be 'respectable' (e.g. upscale hotel lobby) and the other a bit 'rough' (e.g. bus station). What differences – if any – do you observe? Are such behaviours universal or do people seem to respond to the qualities of the setting?

Territoriality, space and interaction

Some aspects of Lofland's book, for example, the idea of the 'nester' or her discussion elsewhere of the colonization of particular spaces by groups of friends, touch on the issue of 'territoriality'. This concept centres on ideas of 'ownership' of spatial environments, and provides a further fruitful avenue for visual social science. A related line of work investigates the design of spaces that facilitate social interaction by inviting or channelling participation rather than excluding others. Research into such themes has been genuinely interdisciplinary with important contributions from anthropologists, social psychologists, architects and designers as well as sociologists. Closely related to this study of territory and design is the investigation of the ways humans utilize space. This latter field has been termed 'proxemics' by its founder Edward Hall (see e.g. Hall, 1959; 1966; 1974).[3] Hall emphasizes that spatial awareness is very much a cultural phenomenon and a good deal of his most influential book on proxemics, *The Hidden Dimension*, is devoted to cross-cultural differences in spatial sensitivity. We allow ourselves to be physically close to others and to interact with them, or keep our 'personal space' according to cultural and situational norms. People in China queue closer together than in Europe; norms about appropriate personal distance are different in a crowd of sports fans than in a bank – and so forth.

Because material culture and the built environment play a key role in this sort of process, observational opportunities open up for the visual sociologist. Hall refers to a distinction between 'sociofugal' and 'sociopetal' spatial arrangements. The sociofugal space typical of most hospital, airport or railway waiting areas serves to keep people apart. Sociopetal arrangements, of which a common illustration is provided by European sidewalk cafés, tend to bring people together. Hall

[3]For a more contemporary treatment of many of the themes in this section see Lawson (2001).

recounts an experimental intervention undertaken by the physician Humphrey Osmond and psychologist Robert Sommer into the spatial organization of a large female geriatric ward. Although the ward was new, brightly painted and apparently cheerful, there was almost no interaction between the patients. The problem was that the ward had too many sociofugal spaces and as a consequence the patients were coming to resemble the furniture 'permanently and silently glued to the walls at regular intervals between the beds' (Hall, 1966: 102). Osmond and Sommer had earlier noted that in the hospital cafeteria the maximum number of conversations occurred when patients were seated diagonally across the corner of tables in the a–f configuration (see Figure 7.1). They reorganized the ward and put in a number of small tables to facilitate a–f interactions.

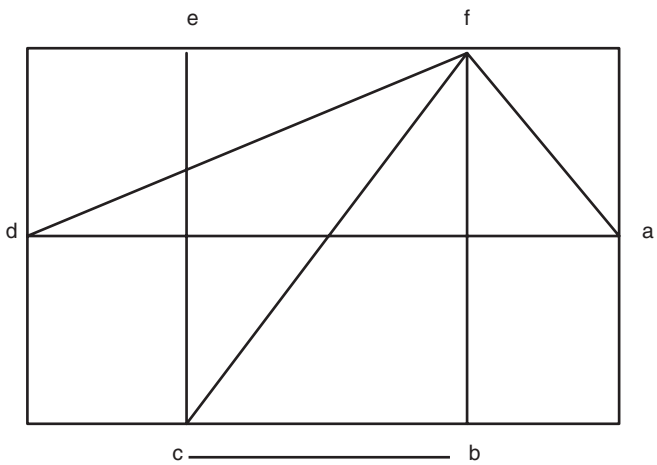
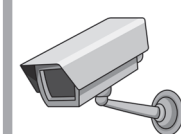


Figure 7.1 *Possible combinations of seating arrangements at a rectangular table*
Source: Hall (1966: 102)

7.5 EXERCISE



Gender Differences in Seating

Estimated time required: 1 hour.

According to pop psychology, reputable social psychology and much feminist theory, women are more supportive and pro-social than men. We might expect this gender difference to be reflected in seating patterns. Is it the case that men sit opposite each other and women in side-by-side or diagonal patterns? Our casual observations suggest that this is the case. Select a location such as a coffee shop or park. Make a plan or map of this, paying particular attention to coding each possible seating space. You could fill a space with M for Male, F for Female or use even finer grained distinctions related to age or apparent ethnicity. What patterns do you detect? The project can be easily extended in theoretically interesting ways by selecting comparison sites. For example, lesbian café v. gay café v. heteronormative sports bar.

Because they influence social interaction, seating plans can have significant economic consequences. The architecture and design specialist Bryan Lawson (2001: 160–161) studied English pubs. He noted that the popularity of any given bar – and hence its takings – could be influenced by its geometry and seating arrangements. Here sociopetal arrangements are critical to achieving a convivial atmosphere. One bar that did particularly badly had its movable seating and tables lined up in a row as if for a chess competition. The resulting image was uninviting. Lawson saw potential customers pop their heads in the door, then turn away again. In this case it turned out that there were too many tables in the room to allow a more causal scattering. Lawson's studies also showed that cleaners were often the culprits. They moved furniture into patterns that allowed them to do their jobs. Typically this meant lines of furniture around the edges of rooms.

Let us consider two more examples of how seating matters. In the previous chapter we discussed the pioneering work regarding successful public spaces by the urban sociologist William Whyte. Paley Park (see Figure 7.2) is an acclaimed 'vest pocket' park on 53rd Street in the middle of Manhattan that is featured in Whyte's film.

Notice here how the movable chairs arranged around small tables encourage the sociopetal interactions that make this park such a success.

Figure 7.2 *Sociopetal seating in Paley Park, Manhattan* (photo authors)

Even though a waterfall along the wall at the back of the park offers an attractive visual pull, couples and groups often ignore this to engage in conversation. The photograph shows up to six interaction clusters and many people who actually have their backs to the waterfall. The isolated individuals on the far left of the photograph, however, have an orientation to the water feature. Perhaps this offers a socially acceptable justification for 'just doing nothing'. Contrasting with Paley Park's seating plan we have 10th Avenue Square on Manhattan's High Line Park (see Figure 7.3). This is a linear park also noted for its design excellence. It follows an old railway line above street level. At 10th Avenue Square the park unexpectedly cuts across the line of Manhattan's grid, offering a spectacular perspective to a distant vanishing point. A sunken overlook with a small amphitheatre features a window down onto and along the street. Here the fixed linear seating encourages isolated contemplation rather than civic interaction. We see in the image three people who are oriented towards the street in this way. It is only the tempting photo-opportunity afforded by the window that encourages communication. A popular snapshot involves standing with your back to the glass with the street and traffic below. The photo-taking activity of families, couples and groups provides added interest for those who are seated, so perhaps this is skilful design after all.

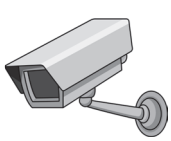
Figure 7.3 *Linear seating in High Line Park, Manhattan* (photo authors)

Goffman and public interaction

Goffman (1971: 28–60) deals most clearly with the questions of space and interaction in Chapter 2 of *Relations in Public*. He identifies eight 'territories of the self'. We shall consider the four which are of most relevance to visually oriented research. Firstly, and of most importance, is personal space. By this he understands the 'space surrounding an individual, anywhere within which an entering other causes the individual to feel encroached upon, leading him to show displeasure and sometimes to withdraw' (pp. 29–30). Legitimate claims on personal space are situationally contingent with what is to count as an 'infringement' liable to moment-by-moment re-evaluation. The social organization of co-waiting provides some useful illustrations of these themes. Goffman notes that to sit or stand next to a stranger in a waiting area or lift would be regarded as more intrusive if the area is relatively unpopulated than if this was the only place available. Typically, then, waiting rooms fill on the basis of a series of continual readjustments as people move closer to others to accommodate later arrivals. But departures create a new set of problems. For example, an individual who moves seat immediately to take up one recently vacated may be seen as unduly offending his former neighbour. However, when the two persons are of the opposite sex then *not* to move to a more distant seat may indicate a sign of inappropriate interest in the other. Accordingly, waiting rooms and elevators empty on a different basis from that which regulates how they fill with occupants waiting for a tactful moment before moving to more open space.

Personal space offers innumerable opportunities for visual research. It is a simple matter to observe how people space themselves out in bus queues and on park benches (see e.g. Bedford's webcam research, Chapter 8). We can likewise observe how reduced interpersonal distances become possible in certain settings, such as a cocktail party or rock concert where norms of strangerdom do not pertain. Things become particularly interesting when the desire for personal space rubs up against another preference, as the following exercise shows.

7.6 EXERCISE



Personal Space Versus Public Distance

Estimated time required: Half an hour for each observed lecture room.

Lawson (2001: 120–122) observes that students like to sit in the back rows of an otherwise empty lecture room. This maximal public distance reduces the chance that they will be called upon by the lecturer but still allows them to be part of the setting. But what happens when the room is full almost to capacity? Now the desire for acceptable personal space might be difficult to reconcile with the desire to sit at the back of the room. Moreover, taking the last vacant seat in the middle of a

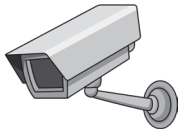
back row can look strange when there are many empty seats further forward. Select an over-subscribed lecture class early in the semester (before students have found a 'usual seat'). Draw a seating plan. Number each seat as students sit in it. Does there seem to be a pattern to the way that the seats fill up? How does the preference for maximal distance from the professor play out in a context where students are also looking for reasonable personal space? Reducing the personal space of others when there are reasonable alternatives is a well-known norm violation, but is there also a norm against taking a seat that is too distant from anyone else? Finally, do you notice norms about personal space changing as the room fills up, in effect permitting reduced interpersonal distances?

Moving on, Goffman refers next to 'the stall', or 'space to which individuals can lay temporary claim, possession being on an all-or-none basis' (1971: 32). In contrast to personal space which has more fluid boundaries, stalls have easily visible and defendable boundaries. Examples would be such things as a particular favourite chair, or a telephone booth, but Goffman suggests they can also refer to the use of a towel on the beach as a means of indicating residence or occupancy.[4] Another difference is that a stall can be temporarily vacated while maintaining a continuing claim upon it but personal space cannot. The issue then arises as to how possession of a stall can be indicated through the use of various markers. These markers offer an excellent resource for visual sociology precisely because they are designed to be visible! A useful illustration of this can be found in Jeffrey Nash's (1982) discussion of the way in which campers signal their occupancy of campsites. Nash is referring primarily to campers in the North American context who use recreational vehicles or other forms of 'self-contained' mobile camping units. The problem at issue here is for campers to mark the occupancy of their campsite when the family decide to drive to a nearby lake or to the local town for provisions and literally take their (temporary) home with them. Nash's research suggested that the objects which campers have devised to mark their continued occupancy of a site carry different symbolic meanings and the more demand there is for a particular favoured site then the more likely it is that campers will use objects which carry greater personal value. So a campsite which is marked by items of clothing such as a special sweatshirt is seen as more likely to be successfully defended than one which has been marked by a cheap item of camping equipment such as a saucepan from a discount store. In New Zealand, which also has a large market in camper van holidays, we noted that the problem of occupancy has been

[4]In Chapter 6 we suggested that many of the stones on the breakwater at Nambucca Heads can be seen as a type of stall. Once a stone has been identified as the 'preserve' of a family unit by an inscription then the stone is unlikely to be used for additional graffiti messages at least for a number of years.

solved in a more institutionalized way. Every van comes with a bucket. If you wish to leave your site you just fill the bucket with water and put it in the spot. The advantage here is that the institutionalized meaning is less ambiguous. The cheap saucepan or sweatshirt may be assumed by newcomers to have been lost or thrown away rather than purposively left to mark a territory. The disadvantage of the New Zealand system is that varying levels of willingness to 'fight' for the prime spot cannot be signalled when everyone uses a standardized symbol.

There are a number of settings which feature stalls and their defence that can be researched by visual methods. Park benches and picnic tables are obvious examples. These present special problems for single people. The benches and tables are typically of a size that will accommodate more than one individual and yet they are often understood as 'taken' (i.e. they become 'stalls') under conditions of single occupancy. When crowding increases then pressure is put upon such occupants to give up their exclusive claims to possession. Goffman suggests that those already ensconced can use a variety of tactics to prevent this from eventuating. For example, in relation to bus and train seating which is typically designed to accommodate two persons, a first occupant can use possessions, avoidance of eye contact and even a 'contaminating part of himself, such as his feet' (Goffman, 1971: 34) as means to reserve the territory for him- or herself.



7.7 EXERCISE

Stall Defence

Estimated time required: 1–2 hours.

Just how strong does a stall defence strategy have to be? Which objects work best? We are not aware of a systematic study of this interesting topic, yet it is very amenable to experimental inquiry. Mark out highly desirable park benches or picnic tables in a choice location at prime time with a variety of objects.

a Remove the objects one at a time. Is there a threshold at which point the stall is no longer seen as occupied? What seems to trigger this?
b Experiment with objects. Do visibly gendered objects make a difference (e.g. romance novel v. action novel)? What about objects indicating social effort (birthday cake v. a can of soft drink)?

Be certain also to note the age, gender, etc., of the people who violate the stall defence. Who seems to be most disrespectful of signs of occupancy?

'Use space', Goffman's third territorial form, refers to the area immediately around or in front of an individual to which he or she can lay some temporary instrumental claim. An example is provided by the expectation that visitors to art galleries will be able to view a picture without another person entering into their viewing frame. Similarly we generally try to avoid stepping in between a photographer and the object of his or her attentions. When two persons are momentarily engaged in conversation on opposite sides of a passage or corridor then a third party who wishes to pass through will typically engage in some minimization of the offence: for instance, lowering of the head or quickening of the gait. You can probably devise an exercise looking into this yourself.

Goffman fourthly considers 'the turn', essentially the mechanisms which regulate queues and the socially organized practices constituting queuing behaviour. We find queues especially interesting. This is because all queues must operate with some sort of ordering rule – 'first come, first served' – and also some sort of claiming device which can serve to validate the first principle. For example, queues at delicatessen counters in supermarkets operate with a ticketing system. Indeed in these situations, because the order of the queue is not visible since customers will typically position themselves along the counter in front of the object they intend to purchase, the ticketing system is the only evidence that there is a queue in operation. But we more typically associate queues with visible forms of organization ranging from bus stops to large-scale sports events.[5] Given this concern with organized visibility it is not surprising that queues and turn-taking in public spaces more generally have attracted some interest from ethnomethodological researchers as a prime example of how people create local social order by themselves using tacit knowledge (e.g. Ball and Smith, 1986; Livingstone, 1987; Garfinkel and Livingstone, 2003). Ball and Smith argue that queues have visible self-organizing features such that we can readily distinguish between queue members and non-queue members: in short, queues have in-built mechanisms which work to maintain their orderliness. Members of queues – or what Garfinkel and Livingstone refer to as the queue's 'local population cohort' – are continually engaged in interpretive work that centres upon the reflexive monitoring of visual information relating to the direction the queue is heading and the appropriate distances which queue members are required to keep between each other, how long the queue's service time appears to be, and so on. They refer to this feature as the '"visual availability" of queueing's local organisation'

[5]Leon Mann (1969) provides a discussion of the cultural aspects of queuing based on observations of queues for tickets for Australian Rules football finals outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG). He mars an otherwise helpful discussion by referring to the MCG as 'the Melbourne Football Stadium'.

(Ball and Smith, 1986: 28). As with other ethnomethodologically based accounts (e.g. see Chapter 4) their focus is on the practical ways in which queues are commenced and maintained.

David Gibson's (2008) observations of Philadelphia's 30th Street Station offer perhaps the best recent illustration of this tradition. Here people queue above staircases in the main concourse for several minutes before being allowed to descend to the railway platform shortly before their train arrives. Gibson noted that queues formed in different directions at the same stairway at each iteration. Also some were straight but others had a slight curve. Why? The explanation to this puzzle was that queue direction was shaped by rule-following behaviours. Overall direction was radically contingent on the position the second or third person to arrive took up. The only 'rule' they had to follow was to stand out of the direct line of sight of the first person. If they stood slightly to the side, say behind a shoulder, the queue would develop a curve or head off on a particular vector. After two or three people were in line, newcomers engaged in 'pattern extrapolation'. They would interpret the line of the queue and continue the sequence so that they could be recognized as having a place in the queue. Gibson also notes that the arrival of a group such as a family, or the growth of the queue until it encountered an obstacle (such as a statue), would make such 'pattern extrapolation' difficult. Special work was required by subsequent arrivals to detect, reinforce or recreate a visible queuing order.

7.8 EXERCISE

Queuing Behaviour

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes.

As forms of spontaneous spatial organization which rely on visual information, queues are a great setting for visual inquiry on public norms. If you have a group of people you can try to establish a pattern in a queue that others will extrapolate. You can experiment with personal space, with direction, and so forth. Which norms can you influence? What behaviours do people resist copying?

a Try standing as the second or third person in the queue and see how much of a curve you can put into the line that follows before new joiners try to correct the direction of the line.
b Arrive as a group and see if you can disrupt the signalling of the direction of the line. Use an outside observer to code the interaction patterns, perhaps with a sketch map.

Body, clothing and display

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, scholars like Lofland, Simmel and Goffman point to the importance of display and the reflexive monitoring of visual information in everyday social life. They suggest that people work to give off meanings and impressions. These facilitate or 'lubricate' everyday social interaction by providing visual clues to others as to who one is and what one is doing. Aside from the gaze, the body provides one of the major tools that people have for accomplishing this complex task. Broadly speaking we can identify three ways in which this is accomplished. Firstly the body can be directly modified (e.g. tattoos), secondly the body can be adorned (e.g. clothes) and thirdly the body can be moved (e.g. gestures). In this section we briefly explore these forms of visual data.

The body

Emile Durkheim observed that in Aboriginal society the body was used to express the social. By means of body painting, ritual scarification, and so forth the body carried with it indicators of belonging and served to reproduce culture. This line of thinking is increasingly central in visual research. By modifying the body people are able to express their identities to others. These modifications might allow them to signal individual personality, political or religious beliefs, conformity or group membership. While some modifications of the body (e.g. genital piercing) are not readily available for a casual visual inquiry, many others can be observed. There is an extensive literature on body hair and the ways that hair (or its absence) can signify things as diverse as sexuality (the supermodel), rebellion (the Rastafarian, the skinhead), conformity (the army crew cut), and so on (for a review see Synnott, 1993). Beards, tattoos, scars and piercings are also significant identity symbols which can be used in analogous ways. It is arguably the case that such uses of the body are becoming more prevalent. They might be thought of as rebellions against the anonymous and bland conformist identities of modernity of the kind that Simmel and Goffman wrote about. Anthropologist Daniel Rosenblatt (1997), for example, discusses this trend as a kind of 'modern primitivism' in which members of affluent Western societies seek to mobilize exotic motifs as a form of resistance to dominant social and cultural structures. More specifically, by mobilizing what they think of as the 'primitive' they are resisting rationalism, the concept of progress, secularization and the alienation of the self.

Make-up also has an important role to play in modifying the body. In Western societies the use of make-up tends to be gender specific and to be tied to idealized notions of femininity. One indirect result of this is that the make-up user tends to be seen as a dupe of consumer trends and powerful ideologies. As Jennifer Craik (1994: 153–154) points out, while body decoration is often seen 'as active and purposeful behaviour, the use of make-up and cosmetics is interpreted as passive and trivial behaviour'. Both can be more accurately – and neutrally – thought of as techniques for expressing or presenting the self through the body to others. Although amenable to systematic visual methodologies, it is notable that most research on body modification makes use of ethnographic methods, with photographs often being used in a purely illustrative way. James Myers' (1992) study of genital piercing and other non-mainstream body modification illustrates this trend. Although Myers provides pictures of pierced genitalia, the main data source for his paper is actually an ethnographic account of workshops which allows him to explore motivations and sub-cultural values. Rosenblatt's (1997) discussion of tattooing, body piercing and scarification goes even further, avoiding visual materials entirely and using textual materials to recreate the meanings of these practices. Such research strategies suggest that in this field a purely visual inquiry might not be able to reconstruct the deep meanings and cultural codes that most researchers are likely to find of interest.

Clothes

As is so often the case with cultural phenomena, Simmel (1957 [1904]) got there first! Simmel argues that fashion can only exist in a society with social mobility. In a society without mobility, then dress differences between classes are permanent and clothes act like a uniform which signals status (there are clear parallels with Sennett on 'public man' here). According to Simmel the rise of fashion corresponded to the rise of the urban middle class. This group aped the clothing of the aristocracy. The aristocracy wished to differentiate themselves from the middle classes, and so tried to improvise new styles. These in turn were copied. The result is a kind of race in which new styles have to be created rapidly and then discarded before they are adopted by groups further down the social ladder. Aside from indicating social status, Simmel asserted that fashion had other uses. It enabled people to assert their self-identify and/or their simultaneous membership of a group. It also enabled people to be reflexive and instrumental in that they could work with clothing to present a desired image or identity in various settings. Simmel's work, then, suggests that clothing can be used in remarkably complex ways to assert personal and group identity and social status.

Another influential study of fashion by a leading social theorist was Barthes' (1983) *The Fashion System*. This difficult book suggests we can

decode clothing as a network of structured signs. Contrasts between, say, bright and dark, top and bottom can be used to formally analyse clothing combinations and fashion changes. It is probably fair to say that the book has had little influence on the analysis of fashion in cultural studies. While the generic point that clothing can be decoded has been accepted, most studies of clothing tend to rely on common-sense judgements to work out the meaning of particular fashions. They tend to be decoded as 'conservative', 'retro', 'vulnerable', 'fetishistic', etc., on the basis of allegedly 'self-evident' features rather than complex semiotic structures. In the project below you will also be required to use your common-sense knowledge of this kind to interpret clothing.

Subsequent research on clothing has tended to take up the sorts of themes developed by Simmel and Barthes. Some studies are more involved with looking at the social uses of clothing (à la Simmel) and others with decoding garments (à la Barthes). Ruth Rubinstein's (1995) *Dress Codes* integrates these two paths in providing a comprehensive examination of the symbolic uses of clothes in Western society. One theme is to dramatize power. Royal regalia and dictator's uniforms exemplify this use. Clothing can be used to demonstrate wealth, through the use of expensive materials and accessories. Experiments by Thomas Hoult (1954) confirmed the importance of dress in evaluating the perceived social status of strangers. Models, some 'dressed up' and others 'dressed down', were presented to subjects who were asked to allocate a rank to them on various social dimensions. Results showed that being dressed up was likely to increase perceived status.

Perhaps the largest body of literature on clothing deals not with status but rather with gender and sexuality. Feminists have usefully pointed to the arbitrary nature of gender conventions, showing that ideals about female beauty and attire change from age to age and setting to setting. Modesty in dress, for example, might be prescribed in some situations, at others a glamorous and seductive look might be preferred, while in yet others a vulnerable look could be the ideal. Much of the literature is driven by cultural studies agendas and debates over whether women's fashions are the product of a male gaze (bad) or are a woman-centred practice (good). Endless discussions about the pop star Madonna in the late 1980s and early 1990s exemplified this dilemma. Some authors claimed her revealing costumes and steamy videos were pornographic and pandered to male fantasy, while others asserted they were a creative and empowered female sexuality. This debate switched to the all-girl band The Spice Girls in the 1990s and more recently the singer and social media phenomenon Lady Gaga. Similar literatures have also arisen concerning cross-dressing and gender-switching.

While clothing can be analysed in situ on the body through direct social observation, it seems to be the case that the majority of work makes use of 2D data – at least in Western societies. In other words, there is a far more extensive literature decoding advertisements and photographs of clothing

than ethnographic studies of clothing in action. We suggest several possible reasons for this. Firstly, questions about changing historical norms can best be explored with consistent longitudinal data – such as pictures in the same magazine over a period. Secondly, magazine data allows for systematic sampling methods and the acquisition of a large sample. We saw both of these advantages in Richardson and Kroeber's research discussed earlier in the book. Thirdly, and most often, photographs and advertisements seem to lend themselves to the kind of elaborate cultural studies decodings that we discussed in Chapter 4. This is particularly the case where the cultural connotations of items of clothing need to be uncovered. As with body modification discussed above, it is difficult to write theoretically involving work based on purely observational material from everyday life. Magazine material provides a way of obtaining richer material with which to work because the clothing is explicitly embedded in a thick texture of signifiers. Illustrative materials can also be reproduced in books and articles so that readers can 'see for themselves' what is being discussed.

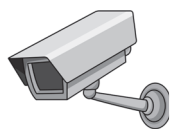
An example of cultural studies research which uses magazine material to good effect to explore clothing is Berkeley Kaite's (1989) study of the uses of the high-heeled shoe in soft- and hard-core pornography. Using complex psychoanalytic cultural theories to explore relationships between the body, shoe and viewer, Kaite interprets the shoe in these photographs as a kind of surrogate penis. It would be difficult to undertake such an analysis using direct observational data, even if the meanings being investigated were non-sexual. To understand the semiotic universe of the loafer or deck shoe, for example, one would do better to look at advertisements and catalogues. These would no doubt feature sailing boats and Ivy League colleges, suggesting connotations of privilege and high cultural capital. Observing people wearing them in the street or library, by contrast, would probably be rather semantically thin.

Having confessed that representations of clothing are often a better resource for cultural studies than their uses, it can still be worthwhile to explore clothing on real bodies. For example, it can be used as a marker of religious conformity or lifestyle orthodoxy. In his ethnographic study of Hasidic Jews, Solomon Poll (1962) suggested that garments ranged from the 'extremely Hasidic' through to those which were worn with modern clothes but could serve as a minimal token of belonging. In a similar vein Werner Enninger (1984) considered how the clothing codes adopted by the Old Order Amish served as an indicator of social status within that community. With regard to dress the Amish have a complex system of permitted combinations governing the three layers – shirt, waistcoat and jacket – of above-waist clothing. Enninger shows how these clothing arrangements can be used to infer specific information about the wearer's 'bio-social status [*sic*]' – for example, age, baptized/non-baptized, minister/non-minister – and the social event for which the clothing corresponds – everyday use, travel or shopping, visiting,

church, etc. Indeed his point is that the clothing arrangements are, in part, a means of constituting the nature of a social occasion. In some developing countries one can look at the tension between traditional and Western clothing in this way. In Himalayan Nepal, for example, women tend to wear traditional dress while men often wear baseball caps, T-shirts and jeans. This suggests that women's roles have been to some extent excluded from a 'westernisation process' (Smith, 1986). Marjorie Kelly (2010) discovered that students at one university in Kuwait dressed differently from those at another, more conservative institution. The clothing stood as a visible index of the cultures of each institution. At the American University of Kuwait more male students wore jeans than the traditional ankle length white shirt or dishdasha. At Kuwait University it was the other way round.

7.9 EXERCISE

Clothing and Expertise



Estimated time required: 1–2 hours per location.

In an ethnographic study of a university gym in Australia, Emma Ogilvie (1995) noticed that clothing styles correlated strongly with claims to expertise – which in the gym is a source of status. The 'baggy T-shirts' were novices who were ashamed of their bodies and did not know how to use the equipment. Advanced users of the gym tended to wear more revealing lycra and to have specialist accessories like leather weight belts (back supports) and gloves. Select a suitable location for investigating this sort of issue. The finishing line of a fun-run can be a good spot, as can a sports club or a popular river for fishing. How is clothing used to signal status? Draw annotated sketches to illustrate your findings with 'ideal types' of the novice, journeyman and expert.

Gesture and posture

The use of the body in interaction is also a potent source of visual data. Humans use 'body language' consciously or unconsciously to convey visual information to others about things as diverse as emotion, social status, openness to interaction and sexual arousal. There is a vast and diverse literature in this field but, although human gesture and expression is very much visual data, much of this research can be only of limited use in the context of this book. There are several reasons for this:

1 It is often difficult to hook up observations on the use of the body to mainstream social theory. Much research is rooted in psychological and biological rather than social and cultural theory. The point of a study might be to draw analogies with the behaviours of animals, or to hunt for psychological/physiological universals in the expression of emotion, or to ask which kinds of gestures will help influence and

persuade people. Such research is essentially in a different paradigm from the qualitative social science and cultural studies orientation of this book.

2 Cutting-edge research on body language often involves the use of expensive equipment (e.g. ultraslow-motion video, brain scans, etc.) and technical languages for transcribing movement and, possibly, its links to mental and physiological states. Birdwhistell's (1970) pioneering studies on kinesics (movement) exemplifies work in this tradition which is closest in orientation to mainstream social science. More contemporary research uses conversation analytic techniques to look at the association between gesture and speech, noting how gestures assist people in mutual orientation and communication (e.g. Goodwin, 1986; Kendon, 2004; Streeck, 2009). Conducting research in these sorts of areas requires specific training that is beyond the scope of this text.

3 Many studies and books on gesture often add up to little more than endless lists of types of gesture or their social function, for example as 'reinforcing', 'encouraging', 'illustrating', 'isolating', etc. An alternative approach, such as that of Robert Norton (1983), is to identify styles of body movement and gesture. Norton locates 'dramatic', 'dominant', 'animated', 'relaxed', 'attentive', 'open', 'friendly', 'contentious' and 'impression leaving styles', each of which has its own kind of body language. Still other studies look to identify and document standardized sequences of movement in episodes such as greeting and courtship. A related trend in the literature is to note cultural variations in gesture meanings or gesturing styles. David Efron (1972) [1941], for example, noted that East European Yiddish-speaking Jews gestured in ways which reflected the logical structure of a conversation. Southern Italians, by contrast, tended to perform concrete illustrative gestures which were 'pantomimic' of the action being talked about. Such work seems to be content to document differences rather than explain them. It draws attention to the importance of gesture in everyday interaction, its forms and variations, but tends to be descriptive in orientation. By contrast our concern in this book (and we hope that of our readers) is to connect analysis of the body and gesture to mainstream social and cultural theory.

Having expressed these reservations there is still a vast store of information that can be used for basic visual research. Here we are restricted to a few examples of the kinds of themes that can be used to inform research by taking the gestures and movements of the body as indicators of social process. Many of these impinge on issues of territoriality discussed earlier. Some of the most interesting studies have looked at status differences in the uses of the body (LaFrance and Mayo, 1978). Findings from these include the following:

- Higher status people are freer to touch than lower status people.
- When a subordinate initiates a conversation he or she tends to be further away from the other party than when a superior initiates a conversation.
- Higher status people also tend to sprawl when they sit and to adopt asymmetrical positions. Subordinates, by contrast, will tend to occupy less space and sit upright, in a symmetrical posture.
- High-status people gaze at the other when they are talking, but tend to look away when they are being talked to.

7.10 EXERCISE

Social Status and Body Use

Estimated time required: As an in-class exercise – comparison of photographs and images, preselected by the teacher: 1 hour. As a more detailed project, upwards of 2 hours depending on size and depth of analysis.

Visit an Internet site that allows you to search images, such as Google Images. Search for pictures of known high-status people such as politicians or business leaders interacting spontaneously with subordinates or the public (not a photo call). What evidence can you see in the picture that status distinctions are being played out via the body? Do you notice any differences between male and female subjects? Now visit the site of a stock photograph company such as Corbis or Getty Images. These sell lots of staged pictures representing typical but idealized institutional settings and interactions to corporate magazines, brochures and websites. Do their images of superior/subordinate interaction look authentic or fake when compared with your real images? How can you tell?

While conducted in another academic tradition, such results provide remarkably strong support for Bourdieu's assertions about the importance of embodied *habitus* as a mode of domination. According to Bourdieu (e.g. Bourdieu, 2001) posture and a sense of being at ease are characteristic of the dominant classes. These embodied attributes are ones of which we are largely unaware and which subordinate classes can rarely learn – unlike, say, textbook forms of cultural capital such as the history of art.

Gender differences in posture have also been frequently noted. Zdenek Klein's (1984) study of sitting postures in males and females provides a representative example of a project with a well-thought-out sociological method, but a typically disappointing biological spin to the analysis. Klein recorded sitting postures in public transportation in Prague outside of rush hour. In each case postures were coded 30 seconds after the bus or tram left the station. In such public settings the sitters were unlikely to know each other or engage in conversation. The postures of 600 men and 600 women were recorded, with a second coder being used to establish the reliability of the coding. For males the preferred posture was one with knees and ankles kept apart. For females, postures with close contact of the knees were more prevalent (see Figure 7.4). Klein is able to discount the explanation that this was due to modesty, by showing that there was no association between the type of clothing worn by the woman (skirt or trousers) and posture adopted. Older women were more likely than younger women to adopt a 'masculine' posture. Men's positions were not influenced by mode of transport, but women were more likely to adopt a 'masculine' posture when in a tram than a train. Klein believes this reflects seating patterns. Train seats faced one another, giving rise to situations of mutual visibility. Tram seats, like bus seats, all faced the same direction, making visual contact difficult.

Figure 7.4 a

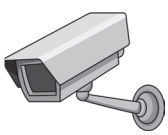
Figure 7.4 b Figure 7.4(a–e) *Types of leg posture in females and males* (photos authors). These photos were taken at various locations at the University of Queensland and in Brisbane city centre. Photos (a) and (b) show examples of what Klein considers to be typical female and male leg postures respectively.

Figure 7.4 c Photo (c) depicts four people seated on a bench. They are all exhibiting conventional postures. Can you identify the gender of each person?

Figure 7.4 d

Figure 7.4 e Photos (d) and (e) suggest that we may be observing changes from the patterns Klein identified. In (d), which contains only females, the posture of the person on the right might be thought of as more 'masculine'. In contrast, in (e) which shows two males at a bus stop, the figure on the left has adopted a strongly feminine posture with both knees and ankles touching

While this methodology for exploring gender, posture and seating is exemplary, like so much of this type of literature, Klein's interpretation of the data is socio-biological and hence less satisfactory from the viewpoint of mainstream sociology and cultural studies. Drawing on data derived from primates he suggests that the male seating posture is one that allows for immediate motion (for defence or flight) and tends to 'increase the contour of masculine stature' (1984: 128). Women's posture is a kind of 'female courtship behavior' which 'presents the individual's more attractive somatic characteristics' (i.e. legs?) to the opposite sex. Klein sees support for this argument in the fact that older women and women in the non-eye-contact trams were less likely to adopt a 'female' posture. From a sociological perspective one might be able to offer alternative explanations that focus on men's tendency to dominate space and their socialization into culturally specific postural norms. A woman sitting with her legs apart, whatever she is wearing, is likely to be perceived as available and subject to sexual harassment. Looked at from this viewpoint, posture is an indicator of gendered norms, habitus and power structures rather than biological imperatives.



7.11 EXERCISE

Gendered Public Postures

Estimated time required: 1–2 hours.

Klein's study was conducted in the early 1980s. Gender norms have changed considerably since that time. If they are the determining factor, it is possible that there will be less difference between the sexes than Klein detected. If biology is a key factor, then one might expect to find results very similar to Klein's.

Try to replicate Klein's study on public transport in your own town. Do your results match his? How, if at all, do they differ? Do you detect differences between participants in terms of variables such as age and race? What, if anything, are you able to conclude about the power of gender norms v. biology as an explanation?

Touch is another kind of gesture that is observable in public settings and is used to signal information between people. R. Heslin (1974), providing yet another of those innumerable typologies that characterize the field, suggests there are many types of touch ranging from the professional touch of the doctor, through the polite touch (e.g. kiss, handshake), the friendship touch (e.g. hugs at airport meetings), and on to intimate and sexual touching. To this list we should add forms of touch that dramatize or enact power such as physical or sexual abuse or the arresting hand of the police officer (Synnott, 1993). In all societies touching is subject to norms. In some cultures touching is seen as an invasion of the self. There are also taboos due to the anxiety

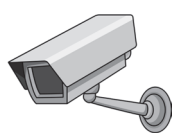
caused by the potentially sexual interpretation of human touching (see Richmond et al. 1991: 241ff.). Norms are also often place specific. Sexual touching, for example, is more acceptable in a private setting than public ones. For this reason many people feel embarrassed when touched by a stranger, or have to apologise if they accidentally touch someone.

As Simmel and others have noted, the modern city has brought people into proximity. This has caused a problem not only for the use of vision and the gaze (qua civil inattention as discussed earlier) but also, on occasion, for touch. Subway trains present a particular problem in that they require people to be pushed up close against one another, violating the customary norms against contact with strangers. Hall remarks that subway riders have 'defensive devices' which take the intimacy out of contact in such public spaces. He writes:

> The basic tactic is to be as immobile as possible and, when, part of the trunk or extremities touches another person, withdraw if possible. If this is not possible, the muscles in the affected areas are kept tense. (1966: 112)

In other spaces touching may be initiated voluntarily. This touching can be coded. For example, a study by Rosemarie DiBiase and Jaime Gunnoe (2004) involved the systematic coding of touching. Researchers unobtrusively observed young people in nightclubs in Italy, the Czech Republic and the USA. The research showed significant differences. Czech men initiated many more hand touches (of Czech women) than any other group. This was interpreted as reflecting the more traditional gender roles in that country and supporting a 'dominance' theory of touching (superiors touch inferiors). Non-hand touching was particularly common in Italy and among women. In the Italian case this probably reflected cultural variation in proxemics but the gendered aspect of the finding remained a little puzzling to the researchers.

7.12 PROJECT



Gender and Touching Norms

Estimated time required: Observation time should be approximately 1 hour per location. Allow time to prepare coding sheets in advance. Total time for writing up your project will increase for each location studied, number of variables analysed and depth of analysis required.

DiBiase and Gunnoe (2004: 60) caution that the setting for their research might have influenced their findings. Nightclubs are a place where romantic attachments might be sought or existing ties expressed. This being the case, perhaps a less sexually charged location offers a better research site for exploring general social attitudes and behaviours.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Select a public location such as a coffee shop or mall. Code instances of hand and non-hand touching that you observe according to the parties involved using a simple coding sheet (e.g. woman touches child, man touches woman). You may also be able to include additional variables such as age and race, but our main focus here is on gender. Remember to make an estimate of the relative populations of men and women so that your estimates take account of the gender balance at your locale. Do men touch less than women? Are young men more likely to touch than older men? What other patterns can you identify? What do your results suggest about the touching norms in our society?

Note: This project can be made even more interesting if converted into a comparative study by locating functionally equivalent locations with different populations. For example, we might expect a trendy inner city coffee shop frequented by executives to differ from a roadside greasy spoon frequented by truckers and bikers. A gay bar might differ from a straight bar. A mall in a lower socio-economic multicultural area might differ from a mall in a privileged and racially homogeneous suburb. This sort of comparative dimension might allow you to make inferences about the strength of orthodox touching norms in various communities.

Gesture and touch are especially significant in generating solidarity when people come together or separate. Goffman (1971) argued that such activities are a central kind of supportive interchange in everyday social interaction. Consequently a great deal of effort goes into ensuring they are done correctly. Adam Kendon and Andrew Ferber (1973) filmed interactions in order to understand the sequence of greetings. They claim that greetings follow a sequence involving sighting each other, demonstrating recognition through a wave, nod or head toss, approaching, grooming oneself followed by a handshake, kiss or embrace. It can be instructive to watch this process at work by hanging out at a popular meeting place and observing. As with greetings, farewells seem to vary in routine according to the levels of intimacy of the parties. Another important variable might be the duration of the anticipated parting. D. Bakken (1977) compared farewells at a student union and an airport. At the union partings might be assumed to be casual and relatively unimportant. Bakken observed them to be accomplished by mutual and simultaneous rotation until the parties were facing in different directions. Sequences of head tossing and a small wave could often come before a verbal goodbye. In the airport there was (1) far more frequent touching, (2) verbal goodbyes preceded the last physical contact, and (3) the remaining party remained stationary while the passenger moved away. By adapting some of the research activities in this chapter several possibilities for comparative investigations on this topic should present themselves to the reader.

Image, body, gesture

In the above section we have spent most of our effort in suggesting some of the ways that bodies in interaction can be studied using direct observation. It is worth remembering, however, that photographs also provide a way of studying these sorts of issues, even if one does not use the kinds of formal observation and coding technique advocated by Birdwhistell. While they are not naturalistic, magazine photographs at least provide an insight into idealizations and cultural conventions regarding the body, posture, gesture and dress. At the risk of intruding on the territory of Chapter 3, we suggest here some brief examples of studies that have used this data source. Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979), as discussed previously, used the body as an indicator of gender ideologies. Morgan's (1989) exploration of dominatrix pornography deftly combines the analysis of facial expression, clothing and body posture in arguing that the genre subverts traditional gender characterizations of the kind Goffman describes. According to Morgan (1989: 116) the 'rhetoric of dominatrix pornography is a revolutionary one, for it seeks to persuade its audience to experiment with sexual difference, to re-play the game of sexual power otherwise'. Morgan notes that in such pictures the clothing and hair of the dominatrix mark her out as feminine. Yet posture and expression have masculine connotations. In a typical photograph the woman stands over the man and dominates him, inverting the kind of representation we usually find in pornography or, indeed, *Gender Advertisements*. Moreover, her facial expression is aggressive. She will often have a scowl and a concentrated Medusa-like stare. This denotes that she despises and hates men rather than looking up to them supportively.

Dean MacCannell's (1989) study of facial semiotics in pornography takes the study of facial expression in a more systematic direction. MacCannell demonstrates that photographs of the face during intercourse are conventionalized – we are able to read the face for emotions and feelings. A knotted brow and screwed-up face indicates pain. Ecstasy is denoted by eyes closed and mouth open. Feats of self-control are demonstrated by upper face, lower face antagonism, such as closed eyes but clenched teeth. MacCannell suggests that many expressions in pornography are rarely found in everyday, asexual emotion. While in everyday life expressions of intense emotion often involve upper and lower face and bilateral symmetries, 'the pornographic frame is often the site of spectacular whole-face muscular antagonisms that are not found in other areas of life' (1989: 159). Hard-core pornography works, then, not by mimicking everyday asexual expression, but rather via claims to difference.

7.13 EXERCISE

Faces, Bodies, Clothes and Photographs

Estimated time required: As an in-class or at-home exercise, 30–60 minutes for one album (teacher or students to bring albums with the owner's consent). As a more detailed project, upwards of 2 hours depending on number of albums or videos analysed (most analyses would need no more than two to four albums/videos). Add more time if you wish to include a literature review and more detailed write-up.

Due in part to feminist scholarship and social concern, much academic attention has been given to idealized images of the body in pornography and advertising. Scholars have also devoted considerable attention to non-reflexive bodily and facial expression in everyday life. Rather less study has been made of a point of intersection: photographic data on everyday life but which also involves staged or idealized social relationships. Weddings represent an important social event in most people's lives where there are strong conventions and performative norms that have to be upheld. Many of these relate to the expression of socially appropriate emotions and the dramatization of appropriate social roles.

Locate a wedding album belonging to you, a friend, or a relative. Carefully analyse the photographs. How do faces, bodies (including gestures) and clothes symbolize the following things: gender roles, social solidarity, love, fun and excitement? Which photographs seem 'fake' to you in terms of expression and which seem spontaneous or more 'genuine'? How can you tell?

Note: There is potential to make this project considerably more extensive by means of time-series data (old wedding albums), cross-cultural data (wedding albums belonging to people with a different ethnic background) or other comparative data (e.g. class, gay marriage). Comparing the album with an informal videotape of the wedding may allow you to explore issues of selectivity in the construction of an idealized version of the wedding.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have continued our push for visual research to move 'beyond the photograph'. We have shown that visual inquiry can also be about the visual organization of interpersonal activity and about the display of identity, emotion, body and territory. This can all be coded and observed – no photographs are necessary. Yet we have ended the chapter by referring to the possibilities that existing images in magazines and albums offer for systematically researching these things. Today the rich tradition that makes use of the existing image looks more promising than ever, for the photograph need no longer have a material existence. We are likely to encounter it on the screen of a computer, mobile phone or iPad. These are digital technologies that have transformed the way we conduct business, interact and spend our

leisure time. They have also have created a new universe of virtual visual data. Much of this is free, in the public domain and instantly accessible. For the visual researcher the Internet offers a cornucopia of materials. More importantly it brings with it a series of exciting new research questions and priorities, in part because it fosters new kinds of interaction. In our final chapter we open up this world and examine some of the opportunities virtual visual data brings in terms of topic and method.

8

Virtual Visual Data

This chapter will:

- Introduce the Internet as a medium which can extend our opportunities for visual research
- Highlight advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet.
- Discuss conceptual issues which arise when doing research on the Internet, such as covert presentations, impression management, and place and space.
- Suggest ways in which the Internet can be used to extend or expand on current methods in visual research, such as the use of webcams or geo-referenced data.

Whereas the previous chapter suggested ways of studying embodied visual data, this chapter now takes us into the realm of the disembodied: that is, the virtual representations which have become commonplace in Western society courtesy of the Internet. To some readers, this may seem that we are going back to where we started. We have moved from a discussion of 2D images through to a consideration of the objects and spaces with which, and within which, we interact, and then to the actual interactions themselves. To now turn to the Internet may seem that we are returning to 2D images – just presented in a different format.

Many theorists do that, treating the Internet as a repository of visual and textual information which can be 'captured' in 2D form and analysed. In this regard, we find that many of the themes and techniques we have explored in earlier chapters can be carried over into this new empirical research site: what is different is not the sociological toolkit being used but the types of communities and communications being enabled by this new technology.

But the Internet also has unique characteristics which differentiate many of its images from other visual data that we encounter on a day-to-day basis. These include:

- Constant connectivity – information can be disseminated rapidly, and sites and images can change repeatedly in response to new data or user input.
- Multi-user engagement – from virtual games with unknown others, tagging photographs on Facebook or participating in a bidding war on eBay, the Internet allows for multiple interactions in a variety of fields and formats.
- Multifaceted presentation/display – a postmodernist's delight, the Internet allows for greater flexibility in how information and ideas can be presented or accessed.
- 'Digital footprints' – with the explosion in user-generated content and online mapping/geographic resources, we now have unique visual traces of human activity around the world.

The Internet as a research site

The first Internet communications were primarily text based. This predominance was reflected in early attempts to theorize about the medium, with authors often analysing the textual offerings on the screen (e.g. Kendall, 1998; Burkhalter, 1999) or focusing on the merits or otherwise of Internet communications which were minus many of the visual signals available in face-to-face interaction (e.g. Sproull and Kiesler, 1986; Smith and Kollock, 1999: 9). However, even as technological innovations throughout the 1990s and twenty-first century expanded to allow for more and more sophisticated visual offerings, the rapidly growing pool of academic literature about Internet images still often prioritized the textual data generated from various sites (as demonstrated by Adkins and Nasarczyk (2009) in their focus on interactional turn-taking in the comments sections of photosharing websites). As Pauwels puts it, 'several of the more basic characteristics of the web have been neglected. Most notably, this applies to the exploration of the multimedia features of the web (as opposed to mainly verbal utterances and practices) … As a very significant source of cultural information' (2005: 604).

A number of texts on visual methodologies have been updated recently to incorporate (or at least acknowledge) the presence of the Internet in everyday life, although often this engagement seems very cursory. In some cases this is explained by a focus on the method rather than the medium: Rose (2007), for example, alludes to the Internet in her preface but appears to avoid updating her methodological examples to include Internet images. Others, such as Pink (2007), devote an entirely new chapter to the Internet, but focus on its *use* in the research process (in this case, ethnographic representation) rather than as a site for examination. New tomes devoted to visual sociology are equally as disparate: Stephen Spencer (2011) engages very little with methodological issues relating to cyberspace even as he acknowledges the theoretical issues of a scopic society enhanced by technological advances; in contrast, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright (2009) are comprehensive in

their consideration of 'practices of looking' encouraged by the Web, although they do not provide methodological guidance for the keen researcher.

Part of the problem with writing a chapter about researching the virtual visual is the nature of the Internet itself and the almost unbounded possibilities it presents to the intrepid investigator. Stephen Papson et al., in attempting to create a website to present their findings on commercial advertising images, noted the problems of assessment created by the more fragmented and less autocratic narrative structures enabled by the Internet, as well as the potential for an absence of 'closure' due to the 'inertia' encouraged by the hypertextual nature of websites (2007: 335). If you have ever spent an afternoon following link after link after link on the Web, losing not only hours of precious writing time but also wondering just how you got from a site on research methods to a random YouTube clip lampooning the latest teen pop idol, you will know the difficulties inherent in utilizing a medium which can just as easily distract as it can instruct.

But there are some very practical reasons for utilizing the Internet as a research site. Here are some of the more compelling motivations:

1 Savings in time and cost.

This is an obvious practical advantage. In just a few clicks, we can often access data which would previously have been laborious and expensive to collate: whether it is copies of the front pages of newspapers from around the world; live streaming of sporting events at geographically diverse locations; satellite images of cities and villages; or culturally specific renderings of the Mona Lisa.

2 Wider range of observable/accessible activities.

In some cases, this is because the Internet has given a new visibility to communities which previously were not easy to access or observe. Teela Sanders, for example, notes how the private and individualistic nature of some activities in the sex-work industry have been given a more public presence through the advent of the Internet (2005: 70). In other cases, seemingly domestic activities which nevertheless contain rich cultural data, but which were not always easy to locate and access (such as family photo albums), have been given new life and a more public presence via the Web.

3 Constant updating of data.

The ability of Internet sites to be constantly updated and upgraded offers the researcher an innovative opportunity to collect and assess longitudinal and/or comparative data. With so many websites able to collate and incorporate feedback (such as fluctuating stock market charts, graphically represented subscriber opinion polls in news websites, or photographs being added to Google Earth every day by people around the world) researchers can use the Web to compare or contrast visual data across time, across websites, or both.

4 Large quantities of data.

As Mike Savage and Roger Burrows (2009) have pointed out, we now live in a digitized world, where the collection and use of social data is no longer the preserve of academic researchers but instead is an ubiquitous part of our information-saturated society. Indeed they have linked this to a 'crisis in empirical sociology' suggesting that the sheer amount of information that is now available on the Web could mean that the collection of primary research data, for so long the foundation of good social research, is now redundant.

However, with advantages, also come some disadvantages. These may include:

1 Information overload.

Some researchers do not know where or when to stop. Good visual research using the Internet should be as systematic and as disciplined as any other theoretical investigation, but it is easy to lose time or focus when there may be thousands of images at your immediate disposal.

2 Inability to utilise the Internet effectively.

No amount of information will be useful if the researcher does not know where to find it, or if he or she lacks the skills needed to save data, analyse data, or understand the jargon being used.

3 Sifting the real from the fake.

When a lesbian Syrian blogger turns out to be a married man living in Edinburgh (MacMaster, n.d.), and when there are numerous websites set up specifically to highlight some of the fake sites, spoof pages and Internet hoaxes, then students may start to question whether the Internet is a valid and reliable data source.

This last problem is not unique to the Internet. In social science research there are many potential opportunities for the fake to be substituted for the real. For example, interview participants could falsify their entire life histories, posters on billboards could be spoofs created by advertising executives, and in many countries phoney news stories and images are routinely interspersed with genuine articles on 1 April. What becomes important, therefore, is the research question, the type of data being examined, and the need (or otherwise) for sites to be genuine representations of underlying characteristics. Just because the Web gives people the opportunity to become anonymous or pretend to be a different person from their real-life selves does not mean that useful information cannot be gained from researching the Internet (as we will demonstrate in the next section).

We will now delve into some of these conceptual issues relating to researching the virtual. Rather than work through Internet sites or applications, which

have a tendency to change quicker than we can write this book, we review the main themes which emerge throughout the literature. Case studies and suggestions for research are provided for particular empirical domains, although we expect and assume that teachers and students will substitute their own applications as the Internet continues to evolve. The issues we cover are covert presentations, impression management on the Web, place and space on the Internet, and the use of webcams.

Ethical issues – a brief reminder

The only constant in relation to the Internet is its inconstancy: change is rapid, new computer programs are always being developed, new sites added, new ideas circulated, and new concerns raised. For researchers, an added complexity is ensuring that appropriate ethical considerations are maintained when using a medium which often appears to be advancing faster than the research itself. In addition, there is considerable disagreement about what constitutes appropriate ethical standards when using the Internet for research. For example, the definition of public v. private, or how a researcher should gain informed consent, are just two of the issues which are causing headaches for institutions around the world.

In our section on ethics in visual research (see Chapter 2), we included a discussion which focuses specifically on current issues relating to the use of the Internet. Before you embark on any of the exercises or projects suggested in this chapter, ensure that you have read the guidelines relating to Internet ethics. In particular, think about how you might justify your research design and details of data collection to an ethics committee. While the Internet will continue to change, the basic principles of ethical conduct in research – of acting with integrity and respecting the rights of others – remain constant.

Covert presentations: anonymity, fantasy and play on the Internet

When the Internet first started to arouse academic attention, there was a good deal of discussion about the possibility for unbounded social freedoms or social spaces which could occur online. As the Web grew, so too did the idea that here was a virtual space where people could free themselves from the shackles of real-world existence. Now, they could become anonymous: surfing the Web, engaging in fantasies, playing games or indulging in the various delights that the Internet had to offer.

One suggested advantage of anonymity on the Internet is that it allows people to experiment with their identity in ways that might be embarrassing or subject to sanction in the 'real world'. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the various

multiple user virtual worlds which abound in cyberspace. A classic example is Second Life. This has often been touted as a realm where ordinary rules of conduct no longer apply, and where users can find true freedom. Participants in Second Life are able to select a body or 'avatar' which they manipulate through a virtual environment. They are able to modify this body, purchase clothes and engage in role play. A growing body of literature has explored the ways that sex and gender seem to be central to such imaginative activity. Robert Alan Brookey and Kristopher L. Cannon (2009) note that Second Life offers various opportunities for gender experimentation. Transgender, intergender, gay and lesbian options are all available. In addition, various forms of non-standard sexual activity are also made possible. Second Life sex stores sell bondage and fetish gear, while clubs offer a venue for sexual activity with strangers. By clicking on a 'pose ball', avatars can engage in any number of extreme or unusual sexual acts with multiple partners.

If this all sounds liberating, Brookey and Cannon are cautious. In many ways, Second Life sex and gender mirror real-world hierarchies. Second Life allows participants to be sex workers or escorts, to buy excessively revealing clothing, to have exaggerated or oversized body parts such as a penis or breasts, and to engage in violent sexual acts. They suggest that even if people volunteer to be sexually humiliated or dominated, they are still participating in a culture of sexual objectification that also exists in the real world – a culture which is based around heteronormativity, limiting the value of women and marginalizing alternative sexualities. Women are more likely to be depicted as sexually submissive, for example. They also note that gay venues tend to be spatially isolated – just as they often are in 'real life' – and that the number of pose balls for female–female sex in some venues outweighs those for male–male sex. This suggests that lesbian sex acts are being perpetrated for heterosexual male voyeurs.

8.1 EXERCISE

Representations in Online Worlds

Estimated time required: As an in-class exercise, 30–60 minutes – comparison of newspapers or comparison of sites, preselected and provided by teacher. As a project, this can be expanded into a more detailed assessment activity, including ethics assessment, brief literature review, selection of sites, construction of coding sheets, coding of data and analysis. Time allowed will depend on size of sample and depth of analysis.

One of the more interesting data sources used by Brookey and Cannon are the advertisements to be found on Second Life. They note that ads for sexual toys and for clothing often reproduce the male gaze or various female stereotypes, such as women being sexually subordinate. Advertisements for pose balls often feature passive female avatars servicing male avatars.

(Continued)

(Continued)

One way to test whether or not Second Life is transgressive or repressive when it comes to sex and gender is to systematically sample and code these advertisements. Then they can be compared with those in equivalent real-life sources. For example, we might compare the *Second Life Herald* with the *New York Times*, or billboards in Second Life with a real street or district in our town. Using resources such as Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (discussed in Chapter 3), construct a coding sheet for themes such as passivity v. activity, interaction with technology v. interaction with children, sexual display, and so forth, that we know are aligned with gender in conventional advertising. Systematically apply this. Be certain also to code for advertisements that are not explicitly about sex or gender; for example, those for cars or vacations as well as for clothes. What does your data tell you? Is Second Life ahead of the curve or a throwback to the 1950s?

This exercise could be repeated for racial stereotypes. Are certain racial features more prominent in certain ads? Are different races represented in different ways?

Dennis Waskul and Justin Martin (2010) echoed this cautiousness about the freedoms of virtual worlds like Second Life. Exploring the many options for participants to construct and participate in a variety of sexual adventures, including deviant, imaginative or dangerous virtual behaviour, Waskul and Martin note how apparently liberating activities are still bound within sexual and cultural stereotypes which are almost exaggerated in their conformity. Avatars are overwhelmingly good looking in the conventional sense (Figure 8.1); women have large breasts; men have huge penises; and sexual satisfaction is always achieved. In other words, although people can play out their wildest fantasies, these fantasies are bound in a cultural script which has been imported from the norms of real life.

What we are seeing, therefore, is a repeat of some 'real world' ideas relating to sexuality and the performance of gender roles. Research has consistently highlighted the way the Internet is a space which – just like places in the real world – requires a level of understanding and order for people to accomplish actions and interactions. This occurs even if the intention is to play with identity or to deceive. As noted by Jodi O'Brien in 1999 when examining early gendered representations on the Web, actors in online spaces need some sort of script or categorization scheme in order to interact with others successfully: 'Without some shared classification scheme, our individually authored characters, no matter how colourful and creative, would have only themselves to play with' (O'Brien, 1999: 85). People therefore bring with them cultural and social expectations which they use – consciously or otherwise – in their interactions and performances online. These expectations, which can encompass such

issues as gender, sexuality, race and class, are played out in the images presented, the actions of the avatars, the spaces they inhabit and the visual environments created.

Figure 8.1(a,b) *Scenes from Second Life* (courtesy of Linden Lab)

8.2 PROJECT

Gender Switching in Online Games

Estimated time required: Preparation, note-taking and analysis of notes likely to take from 1 to 2 hours. Actual playing time will depend on player enjoyment and discipline in taking notes at regular intervals. Beware of becoming so immersed in the game that you forget you are doing an academic project! If you are not a regular player, then it may be preferable to play your chosen game at least once, prior to starting this project, in order to become familiar with the game's aims and conventions, and to practise the art of thinking academically about the actions and decisions you are making as you play. A variation on this project is to complete it in pairs, with one person taking notes and asking questions as the other person plays.

Lori Kendall (1998) was an early exponent of the idea that the freedoms of the Internet could actually strengthen cultural boundaries, rather than erode them. One issue she looked at was gender-switchers in text-based MUDs (multi-user domains). She found that gender mattered – online users made assumptions about gender based on names and behaviour, constructed their own responses based on these assumptions, and were often offended if it was revealed that a person's offline gender differed from their online presentations.

While Kendall's work was text based, you might be interested in testing gender boundaries via a small-scale ethnographical project on one of the visual worlds, for example Second Life or World of Warcraft. Create a new account and play a character of the opposite sex to the one you normally identify with. As you play the game, make a note of the decisions you make when choosing your clothes, actions and activities. Also take note of how other people act around you.

Do you find yourself consciously trying to act 'male' or 'female' in order to successfully pass as your character? Are these actions more exaggerated than you might expect in real life? Do you get sanctioned by other players if your avatar looks or behaves in ways not typical of your online gender (e.g. asking for help if you are a male character, acting aggressively as a female character, or not looking stereotypically male or female)? If you are a regular player, do you find you are being treated differently from when you are playing using an avatar of the same gender as you?

Whereas virtual worlds like Second Life may reinforce norms of sexuality, Michele White (2010) finds the opposite pattern in a study of photographic advertisements on eBay. According to White, eBay is driven by heterosexual norms. Gay and 'gay interest' items are subject to censorship, with inspectors on the prowl for any sign of an erect penis. This is a sex-free zone. However, gay men have devised a range of coded strategies for showing off their bodies and signalling to each other. Swimwear and underwear ads will often feature the bulge of a semi-tumescent or flaccid penis, or offer a well-muscled torso. Unlike mainstream advertisements which often portray men in action, the photographs on gay-interest listings often utilize feminine

norms, the bodies positioned to be gazed upon as objects of desire. The aim is not so much to sell anything, but rather to build community and make contacts. As White puts it: 'Economic transactions are often a by-product of their interest in self-display and communication with other men' (2010: 48). Communication off eBay might follow that is more explicit. Research on video games also reveals a complex reality. Grand Theft Auto develops a realistic world populated by thieves and other low-life characters. Critics have pointed out that these are often shallow stereotypes of racial minorities. An interview study by Ben deVane and Kurt D. Squire (2008) explored how young male users of the game made sense of its racial semiotics. It turned out they were surprisingly sophisticated readers of the text. The players were able to identify the representations as stereotypical and even to point to movies and popular representations that were played out in its scenarios. The study showed that critical distance was possible even in the context of having fun.

Impression management on the Web

While covert messages may abound on eBay, the site itself is grounded in day-to-day life. With some exceptions (such as the 10-year-old girl who listed her grandmother, or the above example where the sale of an item is used to facilitate contact), eBay is predominantly used by people around the world to buy or sell items in a global marketplace based on trust and a reliable Internet connection. However, the phenomenal success of eBay, which sees millions of items sold each week, demonstrates that how something is presented is pivotal. It ensures that viewers will take the time to look – and maybe bid on – the item. In a medium like the Internet where the visual is prioritized, impressions are important.

But what if the item being presented is … you? How do people manage their own impressions online?

Online dating sites were one of the first areas which attracted attention in this regard. Like eBay, there is an important offline connection. With dating sites, it is the expectation that prospective partners will eventually meet each other in real life. This creates an interesting dilemma: how to present oneself in the best possible light online, but at the same time ensuring that the representation is not so dissimilar from one's real self that the person one is meeting may feel deceived. What often transpires is a delicate balancing act which, according to researchers on Internet dating such as Nicole Ellison et al. (2006), Monica Whitty (2008) and Jeffrey Hancock and Catalina Toma (2009), leads to presentations which, while not overtly false, often 'enhance' features considered stereotypically important (especially for those looking for heterosexual partners). For women, physical features are usually emphasized: they are more likely than men to use 'glamour' photographs, enhanced

or retouched photographs, photographs taken when they were a bit younger, or photographs utilizing lighting or cropping effectively. For men, height and social status/success often feature: men may use photographs which give an illusion that they are taller, and they are more likely to incorporate objects or backgrounds which may indicate the veracity of their claims (e.g. posing with their university degrees framed in the background).

This may seem obvious when trying to attract a partner using an online dating site. But what about apparently more benign online representations of self – for example, in the numerous social networking sites, where the emphasis is on maintaining connections with offline friends and acquaintances?

As we write this book, the obvious site to consider is Facebook, the social networking phenomenon of the early twenty-first century. According to Lev Grossman (2010), Facebook was successful because, rather than the anonymity which early Internet pundits celebrated, it is a cyberplace which more deeply embeds people in their everyday lives, encouraging their offline social networks and friendships. But just like the everyday encounters which Goffman argues are often ordered by the desire to manage impressions and present oneself in a certain way (see Chapter 7), so too are Facebook users deliberate in their online presentations. While the textual data available on wall postings or information pages may seem like obvious starting points, the visual data (such as display photographs) can provide us with interesting observations about the impressions given by users (Goffman, 1959).

Shanyang Zhao et al. (2008) studied the publicly available records of university students' Facebook accounts. They determined that people tend to portray themselves in socially acceptable ways, or what Jennifer Yurchisin et al. (2005) calls 'hoped-for possible selves'. Adapting Goffman's insights to the world of computer interactions, Zhao et al. suggested that rather than making explicit claims about our identity, Facebook users are selective in the images they upload and the interests and affiliations they display, in order to present socially acceptable projections about themselves. Prominent among the profiles that they studied were visual indicators that the students were 'popular' and socially well connected: content analysis suggested the majority of photographs available for viewing were of groups having fun or acting in a happy manner (as opposed to solitary photographs or more sombre settings); the number of 'friends' people have was usually visible (the median was over 240); and most account holders had publicly available wall posts which allowed people to see how many postings they had. These visual symbols contrasted prominently with characteristics which appeared almost absent from the Facebook images – for example, photographs that showed 'pessimistic, apprehensive, unspontaneous or narrowly focused personas' (Zhao et al., 2008: 1829). 'Deviant' characteristics were also rare – they found, for example, that sexual orientations tended only to be openly declared or displayed if they were normative (heterosexual).

8.3 EXERCISE

Facebook Presentations

Estimated time required: 30 minutes to 1 hour. As an in-class group activity, discuss ethical and practical implications with the class, then allow 20–30 minutes of analysis per Facebook group including discussion (teacher can save time by preselecting Facebook groups).

Zhao et al. studied university student account holders. However, university students form a particular demographic and the norms of behaviour that the authors found (i.e. students presenting themselves as popular and well connected) may not apply to other populations. Think of ways to study alternative groups of people on Facebook – for instance, observing the visual information provided by members of particular groups such as the 'Class of '84' or people who 'like' a regional conservation group's page. Do a systematic analysis for members of each group you are studying. How do they appear to be presenting themselves? What similarities or differences can you observe? In your observations, consider any publicly available information such as profile images, number and content of photographs, number of friends and friend images, number and type of wall postings, visual indicators of group memberships, and so on.

Note: Since Zhao et al.'s study, privacy of wall posts and Facebook information has become a prominent media issue and more people are 'hiding' much of their information from public view. Public settings often include display photos, friends list and sometimes affiliations, organizations and interests. Private settings more commonly include photo albums and wall postings. Does this demonstrate that, even in our supposedly more postmodern world of blurred boundaries, we still have symbolic delineations between what is considered public (work, sport, etc.) and private (home and family, private leisure)?

An advantage of the Internet is the relative ease with which we can do longitudinal work on concepts like impression management, to see if there is consistency in the information presented on people's sites, or if correlations can be made. Consider, for instance, Zhao et al.'s claim that popularity and social connections are dominant themes portrayed on students' Facebook pages. Michele Strano (2008) made a similar claim, but as well as considering the content of the images, she also based her findings on the dynamic consideration of how often display profiles were updated. In her psychosocial research on Facebook profile images, she interviewed people about how often, and why, they changed their images. She found that younger people changed their images more often: there was underlying social pressure to change, and women were more likely to change than men. She noted that women were more likely to be pictured with friends, and theorized that these constant changes suggested a core emphasis on the construction of group identity, social relationships and activity, whereas men constructed more

static individual identities. While her interviews were not visual research, her findings could be tested by utilizing the methods of Zhao et al., but with repeated viewings of the same Facebook pages over periods of time to record changes.

8.4 EXERCISE

Facebook Presentations Over Time

Repeat the earlier exercises, but include a longitudinal component – that is, view the pages you have chosen to study over repeated intervals (e.g. every week for four weeks). Note if there are any patterns emerging in relation to changes made. How often did people update their profile pictures? Did the women update their images more than the men? Did they have more images of groups of friends compared with the men?

What we can see from works such as Zhao et al. and Strano are the conscious efforts people make to conform, even in the virtual visual media. But what about the possibly unconscious signals which they are sending? Consider the issue of gendered norms. As noted in Chapter 7, gendered norms can be embodied and thus observed – for example, in leg position when sitting – even if the individual is not consciously intending to send a message about his or her gender. Can this also happen online?

This was an issue considered by University of Queensland honours student Morgan Bundy-Wright (2010) in her thesis on Facebook profile images. The choice of image to use as a display photograph is a deliberate strategy, as is the way the image can be presented (editing tools allow people to crop, recolour or change the images they choose in a myriad of ways). But while the individual images may be deliberately chosen to present oneself in a certain manner, the patterns Bundy-Wright observed when looking at a large sample of profile images also gave intriguing insights into other societal patterns. Examining the visual images of 200 people systematically selected from a university Facebook group, she noted distinct gender differences in the photographs used for profile images, which conformed in many ways to the previous literature on gender display differences, such as the auto-photography work of Clancy and Dollinger (1993) which we discussed in Chapter 3. For example, the men were more likely to include objects or actions as the focus of their profile images, displaying masculinity through an emphasis on their athleticism, assertiveness or aggression (see Figures 8.2 and 8.3). The women, on the other hand, were over-represented in a trend she called 'post-production cropping' – that is, using images where parts of the face had been cropped away (see Figure 8.4). Borrowing from social–psychological notions of 'Face-ism' and Goffman's concept of 'Licensed withdrawal' (one of the gendered poses he discussed in *Gender Advertisements*), she postulated that men and women – intentionally or otherwise – are conforming to societal

norms in which women are presented as more passive, elusive or vulnerable, while men are presented as assertive or athletic. Thus, even in cyberspace and with the seeming control of one's image enabled by self-representations, gendered stereotypes persist.

Figure 8.2 *Example of male Facebook profile image* (photo authors). Male profile images – more likely to include objects/assets indicating hobbies or status, more assertive poses, or images of athleticism

Figure 8.3 *Example of male Facebook profile image* (photo authors). Male profile images – more likely to include objects/assets indicating hobbies or status, more assertive poses, or images of athleticism

Figure 8.4 *Example of female Facebook profile image* (photo authors). Cropping evident in a profile image of a female

8.5 EXERCISE

Facebook Profiles and Gender

Estimated time required: As an in-class exercise, 30–60 minutes. Teacher to preselect publicly available Facebook groups for students to analyse; students to work in groups coding and briefly assessing the images (working online or using handouts of images provided by the teacher). As a project, this exercise can be expanded to a more detailed project including ethics assessment, brief literature review, selection of groups, construction of coding sheets, coding of data and analysis. Time will depend on size of sample and depth of analysis, as instructed by the teacher.

Like Zhao et al., Bundy-Wright used a university Facebook group as the sample for her study (in this case, an alumni group). Would you expect similar gendered findings for other types of Facebook users? (For example, older users, or those who have not attended university?)

In order to replicate Bundy-Wright's study, choose a Facebook group or groups to analyse, and systematically select the publicly available profile images for analysis, dividing them into male and female users. In most cases, the gender of the individual will be apparent either because it is specified on the homepage, or because there is sufficient other information provided. You should then decide on a suitable categorization scheme of major categories, and sub-categories. The major categories would include photographs of people v. images or photographs which show objects, activities, drawings or something else. It is then necessary to sub-categorize the 'people' photos: consider the number of people shown, the type of activities pictured, how much of the body/bodies is shown, and the cropping and camera angles of the photos. If other interesting phenomena emerge as you are coding, add these to your categories. Do your results show any differences between the genders? Do they conform to existing studies? Why might this have (or have not) occurred?

Facebook, of course, is not the only cyberplace where people manage and display aspects of their offline lives to an online audience, or unconsciously reinforce (or subvert) societal norms. One of the benefits of the Internet for visual research is that it is a place in which disparate display practices congregate, and there are also a burgeoning number of sites which bring formerly private practices into the public domain. As well as the obvious benefits for the researcher in terms of ease of access, time and cost, this also broadens the scope of cultural phenomena which we can analyse.

Consider, for example, the practice of collating and displaying family photographs. Once a very private practice for a limited audience, there are now increasing numbers of people who are using or creating websites to display their images online. This was an issue looked at by Pauwels (2008), who analysed family websites with the aim of understanding how family narratives

were being portrayed in cyberspace, and what wider implications could be discerned from this seemingly innocuous practice.

As we noted briefly in Chapter 4, home-mode photography reveals not necessarily the intricacies or specifics of a particular photographic situation, but rather broader assumptions about family life. What is or is not included in an album – the people, the places, the events – can provide us with insights into desired impressions, expectations and family stories even when the intended audience is likely to be known to the creator of the album. But what happens when the audience is widened to include unknown others, via the Internet? Pauwels looked at approximately 400 randomly chosen family websites, and his initial research consisted of a visual analysis of the photographs themselves, as well as the layout, text and other design features on the sites (which included allowing for visitor feedback or acknowledgement). He observed that while online albums appeared functionally similar in some respects to traditional albums (for instance, in preserving memories and experiences, and highlighting preferred values and family bonds), there were also a number of new functions arising in the online environment. These included broadcasting values and views to the outside world (such as religious beliefs or the role of family), promoting skills and abilities, connecting with wider community members with similar family background or interests, and also as spaces for coping with and making meaning out of traumatic events (for instance, memorial pages for deceased relatives) (Pauwels, 2008: 43).

We have already indicated that sites like these also offer a way of exploring societal norms writ large. Pauwels noted, for example, that a number of people use family website templates from existing web operators. One feature of these templates is that events and occasions are already categorized. This, he indicated, adds a new online dimension to the reproduction of cultural expectations about what is considered acceptable viewing, versus what aspects of family life are not normally shown to the public. It may also assist in helping the user arrange his or her family website in the most socially appropriate manner, reiterating the common theme of self-presentation we find in much of the work on the Internet. Not only does this mean that we can include preferred images, and *not* include visual stimuli which we feel do not accord with the impressions we wish to give, but also (as noted by Cheung, 2000) the Internet gives us a virtual barrier which has the potential to protect us from some of the sanctions we could experience in offline 'face-to-face' interactions (such as derision or disbelief) if we intentionally or accidentally transgress perceived norms. It may thus allow website creators to be more idealistic or adventurous in their presentations (compared with the more traditional family album), perhaps allowing for more nuanced insights for the observant researcher.

8.6 PROJECT

Family Websites and Social Norms

Estimated time required: 2+ hours. As an in-class group activity, this project can be simplified to an in-class exercise if the teacher preselects and bookmarks a smaller number of suitable templates and websites for students to analyse. Allow 5–10 minutes per site for discussion.

When we took a quick scroll through some of the family templates available on the Web, we observed the sorts of recurring themes which have become expected in traditional albums: births, baptisms, holidays, graduations, anniversaries, weddings and other 'significant' milestones. Absent tended to be those occasions with culturally negative or non-normative connotations, such as divorces, school expulsions, 'outing' announcements and funerals; or the mundane and non-joyous activities of everyday life, be they teenaged tantrums, financial transactions, tea breaks in the office, or will signings. Also evident in the templates were visually normative expectations of family. Single people were absent, as were childless couples, older parents or families with exceedingly large numbers of offspring.

But is this normative environment repeated in actual family websites (as opposed to the templates)?

For this exercise, select between 5 and 10 family website templates available on the Web. Firstly, analyse the front pages: are there similarities in how families are presented? Consider the semiotics of the pages – are there dominant colours, themes, or other design features which suggest certain normative assumptions relating to families? Once you have done this, consider also noting what categories are provided or suggested for website producers to arrange or order their family photographs and other information.

Then, randomly select between 5 and 10 publicly available family websites, preferably ones which have not used an obvious template. Analyse these websites in the same way as you did with the templates: consider the front-page presentations, categorizations, images used and any other design features.

Compare and evaluate the two. Are there differences in the real websites as opposed to the templates? What are the differences?

Before leaving this topic we note that the analysis of the presentation of idealized versions of social life need not be restricted to still photographs. Sociologists can also look at online video footage and analyse this without needing extensive training in film studies methods. For example, Robyn Longhurst (2009) investigated birth footage on YouTube. Many videos in this genre were in effect short movies showing the woman pregnant, going to hospital, having the baby and interacting with it. Longhurst noticed how the uploads showed women conforming to the role of the 'good mother'. For example, the clips expressed the emotion of joy rather than showing physical

pain. Often a message about mothering and family unity was underlined via a soundtrack or text. Family members were shown being loving and supportive. Regardless of whether or not the videos reflected the true experience of having a baby, Longhurst sees them offering insight into social norms about the 'good birth' and into gender and family ideology.

Lastly a word of caution: by offering large sample sizes the Internet offers a tempting resource for visual researchers with positivist tendencies. This is especially the case for scholars in areas such as social psychology or sociobiology. They hope to catalogue objective features of social life and to correlate these with underlying causal variables. All too often themes relating to the presentation of self, such as we have explored here, can torpedo any hope of a confident knowledge claim. For example, Piotr Szarota (2010) wished to investigate variation in national levels of happiness using 2000 photographs from 10 countries uploaded to Windows Live Messenger. These were systematically coded for smiling. Szarota noted that levels of smiling varied cross-nationally and were lower in Eastern Europe than Western Europe. The smile data correlated quite well with survey data on national happiness. At first glance this is an ingenious project that validates a new measure. However, Szarota himself concludes that the photographs might not indicate objective happiness at all. The several reasons he gives are all related to presentational norms. When Eastern Europe was under communist control people learned to suppress emotions. Gendered norms about being expressive might explain some of the cross-national variation, as could less gendered norms about displaying only an authentic self. In other words, the photographs that were posted might tell us more about social expectations governing the appropriate presentation of self than about underlying mental states and subjective well-being.

Place and space on the Internet

Just as online photo sites can offer normative or conventional representations of family or friendship, real-world places and spaces can also be presented in edited and idealized ways which reinforce cultural mythologies. If we take them more literally (a risky strategy given the issues of selection and presentation we have just outlined), or believe they offer some kind of back stage view, they can also be used to capture variations in the way places are experienced or imagined.

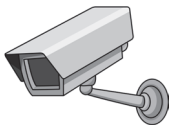
A study by Melissa Wall (2009) of YouTube videos of Africa represents such themes rather well. She begins by noting that Africa has long been depicted in stereotyped ways. It is a 'close to nature' place where there are warring tribes, simple but happy people, poverty and economic marginality, and strong expressions of sexuality in various combinations. Such representations

have fed into colonial agendas. But what of new media technologies? Have these made representations more diverse or realistic?

Wall systematically sampled YouTube videos using the keyword search 'Kenya' and 'Ghana', and coded the main theme of the video (tourist activities, entertainment and sport, religious activities, and so forth). Among other findings, she notes that tourist videos of Kenya tend to represent it as a depopulated landscape inhabited largely by wild animals (Figures 8.5 and 8.6). If people appeared they were likely to be Maasai tribesmen rather than city dwellers. Videos on Ghana were more likely to feature African people, this reflecting the lack of a well-developed safari industry and a stronger focus on the history of slavery and urban life in tourism activity. Both sets of images reflected the tourism promotional strategies of tourism ministries. Posts to YouTube by Africans themselves, by contrast, had a much stronger focus on sport and entertainment. They put up music videos of their favourite local artists, clips of goals by football stars or grabs from television shows.

Figure 8.5 *Typical tourist image of Kenya* (photo reproduced with permission). Typical 'tourist' photographs of Kenya, focusing on the wildlife and landscape

Figure 8.6 *Typical tourist image of Kenya* (photo reproduced with permission). Typical 'tourist' photographs of Kenya, focusing on the wildlife and landscape



8.7 EXERCISE

Analysing Online Promotional Images

Estimated time required: 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on number of videos analysed.

Many countries and cities wish to promote themselves in new ways. This is an attempt to diversify their economies, generate upscale in-migration or simply revive a flagging reputation. Influential theories routinely suggest cities can turn themselves around if they have a thriving art scene and offer varied opportunities for cosmopolitan consumption. Consequently, tough industrial cities, for example Glasgow or Liverpool in the UK, now tout their art galleries, parks, restaurants and museums in an attempt to attract affluent visitors and potential investors. Using Wall's methods, code YouTube videos about these or other places uploaded by locals, tourists and official local authorities (the city council, the tourism office, etc.). To what extent do the old stereotypes remain? What evidence do you see that the new definition of place has successfully caught on? And with whom? Note that you can easily modify this project by shifting to a country level. For example, emerging economies such as China, India or Brazil want to be thought of as leading edge and often invest in spectacular infrastructure. Yet evidence can still be seen of a peasant economy in places like street markets. What kinds of images of place get uploaded to YouTube?

However, it is not just nations or cities that promote themselves in the ways indicated by Wall's work or in Exercise 8.7. Closer to home every tertiary institution now boasts a web presence as this is seen as essential in its endeavour to compete for both domestic students and the lucrative international market. The images on university websites offer a fascinating way of exploring the institutional visualization of academic disciplines. The following exercise is a case study of the representation of sociology.

8.8 PROJECT

Analysing Website Representations of Sociology

Estimated time required: 2+ hours for more comprehensive analysis. However, the project can be simplified to an in-class exercise of between 30 and 60 minutes if the lecturer or tutor preselects and bookmarks website images for analysis. The class can work in groups to analyse and discuss the images.

It is often remarked that sociology is a multi-paradigm discipline with numerous substantive areas and many divergent theoretical and methodological perspectives. So choosing an image which can best illustrate the discipline of sociology – and which

can catch the eye of a potential undergraduate – can be difficult. At the university where two of the authors are located – the University of Queensland in Australia – Sociology is located in the School of Social Science along with the disciplines of Anthropology, Archaeology and Criminology. The School's website features a rotating 'banner' image for each of its disciplines. Anthropology is represented by a photograph of Papua New Guinea tribesmen in their ceremonial feathered head-dresses; Archaeology depicts a laboratory scene with two students closely inspecting an artefact; Criminology features a rear view of a handcuffed young male. Each of these images, though somewhat stereotypical, is arguably an accurate representation of the discipline's curriculum. The image which has been chosen to accompany Sociology, however, is a blurred photograph of pedestrians crossing a city street shot at waist height. (These images are available at www.socialscience.uq.edu.au.)

While we are perfectly happy with this scene of urban *flânerie* – and the tradition of Simmel, Goffman and Lofland which it evokes – it has struck us as somewhat odd given that sociology in our School has a reputation for its quantitative methods and large-scale survey research and shuns the naturalistic observation of social life. But, of course, these are more difficult to depict.

So how have other universities responded to the challenge of the online depiction of their Schools or Departments of Sociology?

Visit other university websites and record the images they have chosen to represent their Sociology Departments. Take advantage of the truly global capacity of the Internet and sample universities from all regions or continents. Code the image using some basic system of categorization, for example images taken 'outdoors' v. images of 'indoor' scenes, images of 'people' v. images of 'objects or places'. The research by Sharples et al. on the photographs taken by children discussed in Chapter 3 might be a useful place to start. Is there any obvious pattern to the choice of images? Are there any wider lessons that we can learn from this about the way that the discipline of sociology is currently organized or might be heading? Could you do a better job at creating an appropriate website image?

Contrasting with online video images offering idealized representations are those that display unauthorized or back stage aspects of a setting as this is perceived by a particular group. Of course these still reflect aspects of experience that are directed to a particular audience and that conform to certain norms about what others will find interesting or socially acceptable. That said, in some cases they can provide a resource for the visual researcher who wishes to uncover hidden truths or, more reasonably, contrast official and unofficial understandings of place. Kari Anden-Papadopoulos (2009) looked at images from the Iraq War posted online by US soldiers stationed there. These showed soldiers killing people to a rock music soundtrack, goofing around, playing pranks, humiliating local children and torturing animals. Tributes to fallen comrades often contained graphic scenes of injury, pain and emotional distress. These images reflect certain aspects not only of conduct but also of occupational culture. They contrast with the Pentagon's desire to portray a clinical war conducted by

a disciplined, professional and humane army. As Anden-Papadopoulos (2009: 27) points out via a 'multiplying of perspectives', the World Wide Web 'empowers users to go beyond the one-way broadcasts directed at them'.

As this example tellingly shows, promotional representations are by no means the only ways that people can access information about many places and spaces that interest them. The uploading of images and information from around the world has been taken to new heights with the capabilities of online spatial mapping technologies. Every day, millions of professional and amateur contributors are generating geographically referenced content about places and spaces which is being linked to virtual globe programs such as Google Earth or Bing Maps, and changing the way we can visualize and learn about our world. Satellite images and aerial views form the starting point by which we see the world: zoom in a little closer and layer upon layer of overlapping icons, information and observation opportunities are presented to the computer user. As well as different viewpoints offered by the platform providers (such as bird's-eye view, 3D mock-ups or street-level images), users can also access geo-tagged photographs uploaded to popular sites like Panoramio or Flickr, symbols marking the geographic locations of businesses, information boxes on an assortment of attractions or activities with visually starred ratings, traffic markers, geographical features, and a growing list of other icons, images and information. Michael Crutcher and Matthew Zook (2008: 524) note that, 'because the use of Web 2.0 mapping is trivially easy … There is often the impression that we are entering an age of cartographic direct democracy.'

However, just as the simple 2D colonial maps produced hundreds of years ago were inscribed with political and social agendas, so too Crutcher and Zook point out that the new virtual globes and maps also represent the world in visual ways which can give us an insight into offline relationships and/or inequalities. Research has shown differing patterns in geographical uploads which are not necessarily related to population density but more likely due to social and economic impositions on digital development and usage: for instance, many Western cities have layers of peer-produced data which is overwhelmingly more voluminous than large parts of Africa or India (Graham, 2010: 429–430; Graham and Zook, 2011: 121–122). Differences can be obvious within cities too: Crutcher and Zook used the example of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans to show how a mapping mash-up created in the immediate aftermath – to assist people with information about flooding – demonstrated distinct racial divisions which they argue mirrored the offline digital divisions in the city. Other researchers have noted the differences in tourist paths taken by Italian and American visitors to Rome, by using visual patterns which can be created using Google Earth and geo-referenced photographs taken by the tourists (Girardin et al., 2008).

These studies have tended to use sophisticated modelling or quantitative analysis techniques which are not available to the average university student. But it is still possible to analyse virtual landscapes which abound around the Web in ways which can provide interesting insights. In particular,

analysis of online mapping spaces can draw attention to the economic and cultural prerogatives which pervade the Web. Rather than being neutral spaces which just detail the geographical features of our landscape or the built environments of our cities, the overlapping layers of information and icons which appear on these sites can show us such things as:

- What types of institutions are prominent – or considered important – in various areas.
- Which features of a particular area attract the attention of photographers or videographers.
- Which types of businesses are adept at utilizing online mapping spaces for promotional purposes.
- Traffic flows on different streets at different times of day via live traffic icons.
- The locations of webcams, and the images from these webcams at different times of day which can be used for content analysis or general inferences.
- Different patterns of user-generated data in different suburbs or cities.

8.9 EXERCISE

Evaluating Uploaded Online Images

Estimated time required: 30–60 minutes.

An interesting exercise to do is to study a Google Earth, Bing Maps or other mapping image of a small area well known to you which includes overlaid georeferenced data, and then to compare it with (a) local maps or brochures of your area produced by the relevant council or tourist authorities, and/or (b) your own knowledge of the area as a local. Systematically evaluate the differences, and then consider the possible reasons for these differences. (Similar exercise to earlier chapter.)

For example, the local suburb of one of the authors was investigated by comparing the photos tagged on Google Earth with photos displayed on the Wikipedia page for the same suburb, and also a promotional community page for the suburb. The photos on the latter two pages were all of views towards the surrounding mountains or the city, often foregrounded by sports fields or spacious streetscapes. As these two sites would, we assume, be compiled primarily by residents or ex-residents, it appears that a primary emphasis is on the lifestyle afforded by living in the suburb: that is, there is an emphasis on living (houses), sport and the open spaces giving views to the distant hills. However, the photos uploaded to Google Earth had a different pattern. Over 80% of them were located in the adjoining bush forest park, and the emphasis was on the wildlife and the local reservoir. The few other photos were also dominated by close-range images of animals and plants. Even with an awareness that photos selected for Google Earth must comply with particular guidelines, the paucity of scenic photos in this area and the emphasis on wildlife is a distinctly different pattern from the other two websites. We theorized that the Wikipedia and community pages focused on displaying the suburb with an emphasis on residential amenity: views, sports fields, wide streets – perfect for family living. On the other hand, the Google Earth photos emphasize what a visitor might be looking for: bushwalks, wildlife, rugged land.

The world of volunteered geographic information on the Web has been taken a step further with the explosion in mapping mash-ups (i.e. the combination of data from different sources into new, and usually highly visual, results). The enormous number of mash-ups being generated every day is a potential bonanza for visual researchers – from the locations of public toilets or fast food chains, disease patterns across states and countries, UFO sightings, apartment listings, Twitter trends, superimposing public unrest statistics over social demographic patterns for particular areas, and so on. Never underestimate the potential uses of these often amusing but also highly insightful mash-ups. A bit of creative thinking can mean a huge saving in time and cost – and the hard work can be done in the comfort of your own home. By seeing visual imagery of the geographical dispersion of different phenomena, researchers may be able to hone in on particular patterns or discrepancies.

Using Mapping Applications

Some available applications allow people to see a visual representation of the location of all their friends on Facebook. Researchers interested in social connectedness may be able to ask willing participants to provide them with aggregated social network maps, which are generally easy to download and use. Not only would this visually aggregated data make a researcher's job easier, but it also increases the ease of collecting data which does not create ethical issues: for example, a social network density map provided by a consenting participant allows researchers to get an idea of friend networks without having to look at a participant's listing of friends, or asking the participant to provide data which would be far more tedious to compile.

Even more creative (and technologically savvy) researchers may wish to create their own mash-ups or applications which can utilize the visual appeal of the Internet in new and interesting ways. For example, 'Place Pulse' (Salesses et al., 2011) is an innovative way of collecting data on people's perceptions of urban locations, in order to ascertain what sort of places look 'safer' or of a better 'class'. They provide geo-tagged pictures of different places and viewers click on which appear safer!

But mapping applications do not just need to focus on patterns that can be correlated with geographical coordinates. As noted in our earlier chapter on direction finding (Chapter 4), hand-drawn maps can be investigated as sites of practical reasoning. Another way to think of this is the concept of 'map as process' (Dodge, 2005: 115): that is, as a means to organize complex data in ways which are easy to follow, understand and make meaning from. This is especially important when considering how to visually represent the *unseen*.

Visually signifying unobservable or hidden phenomena is not new. Especially in science and medicine, visual images have almost become a benchmark for communicating information: consider the use of CAT scans or MRI images, seismographic images or the modelling of spectral data cubes. What the Internet can do to the visualization process is add the factors of *time* and *reflexivity* to many mapping techniques, allowing researchers to use current or longitudinal information which can be instantly updated, as new data and feedback from anywhere in the world are incorporated into the representation.

This is well illustrated in the case of financial markets. 'The market' is not a physical entity, just as 'the economy' is not a physical entity. It is formless and intangible, and is made up of trillions of pieces of information about trading transactions the world over. Nevertheless, because of the centrality of 'the economy' to the prosperity of nations we have grown accustomed to speaking of it – and visualizing it – as if it was a real entity: as something which falls sick, capsizes or is otherwise recklessly 'steered' by our political masters. But such forms of discourse are surprisingly recent as we showed in our discussion in Chapter 4 of changing cartoon representations of the economy. Although the economy – and its constituent processes and categories – continue to be visualized in these reified or anthropomorphic ways by cartoonists, the digital age has heralded the rise of novel – and more technical – ways of depicting the economic and financial systems. Perhaps the most interesting are the interactive online representations which traders use when trying to capitalize on market movements. Traders rely on various visual devices which succinctly summarize the information they are interested in. Charts, candlesticks, market maps, aggregate volumes and more, changing rapidly to incorporate the latest movements in the market.

As researchers, how can we utilize visual data like stock charts and market maps (apart from possibly making a quick profit if we believe that we can 'see' trading opportunities!)? A first step is to consider how our 'looking practices' are being culturally guided. Sturken and Cartwright, drawing on work by Nikolas Rose (2006), point out that all efforts to transform unseeable phenomena are not neutral but are culturally dependent and can thus also influence how we come to understand or see our world (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: 349). In the case of financial markets, therefore, a simple semiotic overview of a market map shows some of the inherent assumptions which have been inbuilt into market representations over the years. For example, increasing share prices are shown in green; decreasing prices in red. The latter is implicitly not good – red is a warning sign, telling us something is not right. Green is good – green means prices are going up. Not everyone might agree that rising share prices is a good thing. Environmentalists may argue that expanding industries are threatening our environment; employees may look on in disbelief as their jobs are outsourced to cheaper overseas labour

in order for profit margins to be increased. But for people looking at market images, the message being sent is that rising share prices are paramount – a sign that all is well – and that economic growth is an essential concern.

What visualizations like this do is to abstract out of the equation many variables (such as customers or employees) which are essential to the performance of markets. Instead, the images on the screen become the primary object to which traders orient themselves – an 'epistemic object' which, though constantly changing and intangible, nevertheless is seen by the traders as an invaluable visual tool which provides all the information that they need to inform their actions (Knorr Cetina and Bruegger, 2000; Zwick and Dholakia, 2006; Mayall, 2008). These market images have thus been studied as sites of practical reasoning: how and why people use and interpret what they see on the screen (e.g. Mayall, 2006).

Webcams in visual research

A chapter on virtual visual research would not be complete without a discussion about webcams. The first webcam, in 1991, famously showed the contents of a coffee pot in the Trojan Room of the Cambridge University Computer Science Department (Figure 8.7). But now, all over the world, cameras are recording a myriad of activities, people and places, and then broadcasting those images to anybody on the Internet with the time and interest to watch. People walking through Times Square, posing on the Abbey Road pedestrian crossing, wandering around beachfront areas in the Philippines, or cycling past Montreal's Parc La Fontaine are all being recorded and streamed for a worldwide audience. There are bridge cams, park cams, shopping cams, castle cams, ski cams, uni cams, tourist cams and cams for all sorts of sporting events. There are cams in government buildings, corner stores and on the bridges of cruise ships. There are mobile cams worn by people as they go about their daily lives, and there are cams in offices, homes, dorm rooms that bring other people's daily lives to us. As Giampietro Gobo (2011) says, ours is an 'observation society' where the camera is ubiquitous; observing and being observed are becoming, more and more, almost implicit conditions of participation in Western society.

Using webcams in visual research overlaps with the use of video cameras. The use of videos in social research is a densely argued perspective which has seen exciting developments in the last few decades. A lot of the literature has focused on explicating human communicative practices, and the tacit work being done in accomplishing all sorts of everyday tasks or work activities. For instance, Heath and von Lehn (2004, see also Chapter 5) analysed videos of patrons visiting art galleries and how they interacted with the

Figure 8.7 The Trojan Room coffee pot, displayed in the XCoffee viewer

Source: Wikipedia (reproduced with permission of Quentin Stafford-Fraser)

various artworks, and Heath and Luff (2007) studied the implicit work being done by art auctioneers in order to try and elicit sales. All sorts of organizational domains, and the way that people work in these environments, have also been scrutinized via video recordings, such as 'call centres, mobile offices, operating theatres, construction sites and control centres' (Heath and Hindmarsh, 2007: 156).

How webcams can be used in visual research extends on much of this work, and repeats methods already detailed in this book: that is, observing human interactions, analysing settings, doing detailed content or semiotic analyses. Where webcams differ is in opening up possibilities in a wider cross-cultural sense, or in allowing us to view activities from perspectives that would previously have been difficult, costly or time consuming to access. Once upon a time, few researchers could perch themselves, safely and unobtrusively, above a popular shopping spot or over a busy traffic intersection. Even those individuals with access to video cameras and large budgets would find it pressing to place their technology in a host of separate locations around the world and start recording simultaneously. But now, we do not have to.

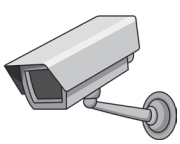
Of course, locating suitable webcams for our studies can be time consuming. However, Timothy and Groves, considering the implications of webcams for tourism research, noted as early as 2001 that directories are being constantly established and updated which compiled lists of existing webcams (e.g. www.earthcam.com). For you researchers, the tendency for Internet benevolence in the form of directories, compilations, lists and even answers to ridiculously worded Google questions should be used to your advantage!

However, before getting too excited about the use of webcams, it is important to consider that not all cams are created equal. For instance, not all are live streaming: many update photographs at periodic intervals – and these intervals could be significant to your research. Depending on your topic, you need to consider whether a 10-second update or a 15-minute refresh will affect your research aims. Another factor to consider is the quality of the image: while some will allow you to minutely inspect people's facial expressions, other cameras provide poor, grainy images at best, and may only be

suitable for broad assessments such as counting numbers of people, the positions of furniture or buildings, or whether it is raining or not. Finally, a bit of healthy scepticism does not go astray to ensure that you really are viewing what the image says you are viewing: one webcam that we visited, apparently displaying a 'live view' of Trafalgar Square in London at 3.00 am, showed people sitting around the fountain – in broad daylight.

Issues to consider when using webcams can be demonstrated in research such as that done by Virginia Bedford. Think back to our earlier exercises on waiting behaviour and territoriality. Bedford also analysed these issues (Bedford, n.d.). She looked at people sitting in a government building waiting room, where there were six rows of chairs for people waiting to do business with a US State Division of Motor Vehicles. She was interested in comparing waiting times and populations over the course of a day, and also whether people usually chose seats based on their distance from other visitors (they did). However, she opted to analyse a series of images, taken at five-minute intervals, from a webcam located on the ceiling, which was linked to the department website and thus visible to any member of the public who happened to look at that webpage. Some of the posited advantages of doing this included the reduced likelihood of people realizing they were being scrutinized by a researcher and thus altering their behaviour; the perpetual and fixed nature of the data as compared with notes and memories of a human observer; and the cost-effectiveness of using an existing and available image stream. However, she noted potential problems with her research: for example, the fixed nature of many cameras may mean that some aspects are not visible or hard to ascertain. Also, her method of using images taken at five-minute intervals precluded knowledge of what happened between the time frames (such as people who came and left in less than five minutes).

Assuming that you can access suitable webcams, however, there are many ways in which past research might be updated, compared cross-culturally or compared longitudinally.



8.10 PROJECT

Cross-Cultural Examinations of Public Behaviour

Estimated time required: This project will be relatively time consuming if done properly. Allow at least 1–2 hours of preparation time (for instance, finding and assessing suitable webcams and making decisions as to observation times, and so on). The actual observation and analysis will take upwards of 3–4 hours. Students completing this project for their assessment should also add time for their theoretical preparation, comparisons and evaluations, and write-up.

The existence of so many webcams, in so many places, means that opportunities exist for cross-cultural comparisons. Anecdotal evidence from travellers suggests that different

cultures have different habits when it comes to everyday behaviours such as waiting, queuing or crossing streets. For example, a popular perception is that the British are compulsive queuers – as an extreme instance of this trait there were reports that participants in the UK riots during July 2011 were queuing for their turn to loot the shops and stores in their neighbourhoods. You may therefore like to examine more closely the behaviour of people captured in similar activities in different locations around the world, to assess if there appear to be any differences in how these activities are culturally organized.

For this exercise, locate some webcams* from different geographical locations which feature places or spaces where people are likely to engage in the behaviour you are interested in. Try to select locations with similar features or *raison d'être*: for example, busy street corners, public transport terminals, shopping malls with activities requiring queuing such as takeaway food counters, etc. Next, think carefully about how you are going to collect and collate your data. For example, will you take screen shots every five minutes for a certain period? Will you record or download live data streams? What period of time, and what times of day, will you compare? (Remember, there are different time zones around the world – consider what time you may need to be awake if you choose locations spread across Australia, Europe, Asia and the Americas!) Think also about whether the time of year will impact on your observations – remember that northern hemisphere seasons are the reverse of southern hemisphere seasons! You may, therefore, have to factor longer term time frames in to some of your observations. Finally, think carefully about the behaviour you wish to analyse, how you will record and code the behaviour, and what sort of social categories you will use.

Once you have collected and analysed the data, compare your results. Did you observe any differences? What were they? And how might they be explained?

A variation on this project may be to select two different locations in the same country: one in a popular tourist spot (such as a street corner in Times Square) and the other in a similar type of location but more likely to be frequented by locals rather than tourists.

*Webcams are constantly being added or updated – but to get you started, consider using one of the websites which compile lists of known webcams; www.earthcam.com is an example of a good site which includes information such as location, and whether the cameras live stream or update at regular intervals.

As well as watching the movements of people, unobtrusive webcams offer other sorts of visual data which can be used creatively. Timothy and Groves' (2001) tourism research included the following options for consideration, which could be looked at from the perspective of a visual researcher:

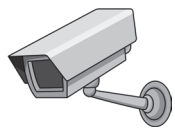
- Crowd density.
- Assessing popularity of different places at different times of day, or for looking at overall movement patterns. This can also extend to traffic density studies.
- Facilities and infrastructure.
- Looking at buildings and land use on a comparative basis, across places or over time, possibly to give an understanding of tourism or other development priorities.
- Licence plate data.
- Simple frequency data based on number plate origins, possibly to give basic geographical information on visitors to certain sites.

Figure 8.8 *A typical CCTV camera* (photo authors)

The idea of using webcams (e.g. Figure 8.8) for traffic analysis is an interesting one. Quantitative studies are routinely done on traffic patterns in metropolises around the world, in order to assist with urban planning. But rather than always quantifying data, consider how traffic may be analysed as an extension of the interaction work we have already discussed in prior chapters. Travelling anywhere in a vehicle piloted by a human involves the same sort of sense making and negotiations as two pedestrians attempting to pass or deciding if it is appropriate to acknowledge each other as they do so. As ethnomethodologists (e.g. Livingstone, 1987; see also Sacks, 1992) have observed, traffic is adaptable – how someone drives does not happen in a vacuum but is dependent on and relative to the contexts of the situation. That is, someone is not a 'fast' driver by virtue of the fact that they always travel over 60 mph (95 kph): rather, 'fast' is defined relative to the other drivers, the current speed limit, and other circumstances at a particular place and time. Eric Laurier (2004) extended this thesis to look at how membership of certain communities gave people a sense of entitlement to justify their speed – such as the 'business traveller', who does not just expect to go fast between appointments on the road, but is also the category of traveller who would expect to be able to speed in other areas such as airport check-ins.

When speeding on the road, therefore, Laurier noted that 'fast' drivers were unlikely to slow to the pace of cars in front. Instead, the preference is to overtake and maintain a speed which differentiates themselves from the slower drivers. This also avoids the appearance of following the other cars – something which is mirrored in the behaviour of pedestrians, who, when walking, will avoid slowing to a speed where it may appear that they are following the person in front (see Ryave and Schenkein, 1974).

8.11 EXERCISE



Analysing Traffic via Webcams

Estimated time required: From 30 minutes for one webcam – total time dependent on how many webcams are analysed, and whether they are analysed at different times of the day for comparison.

While finding webcams good enough to peer inside car windows to assess the attire of the driver is unlikely, there are certainly plenty of webcams along motorways, bridges, intersections and other traffic venues which would give the viewer a good image of the type of car being driven. If the membership categorization of 'business travellers' means that we expect them to be travelling faster than most other people (at least on weekdays), then what might our expectations be in terms of the types of cars being driven? An initial assumption might be that drivers of sports cars would present themselves as fast, while drivers of cute little white hatchbacks might fall into a category we would expect to see driving slower and maybe more distractedly (perhaps because they are fiddling with their iPhones and chatting to their friends). Family wagons we may expect to be presenting as consistent and speed-limit following, and (in Australia at least) we may stereotypically expect to find drivers of utility vehicles swerving at cyclists and giving them the finger before speeding off. But do these membership categories hold sway when subject to more rigorous analysis?

In this activity, spend a period of time doing an analysis of traffic patterns in different locations around your nearest city. As well as looking at the driving behaviours of different types of cars, you might want to consider patterns of traffic negotiation at different locations, to identify 'sense-making' activities in action as people try to navigate their way in traffic.

As well as unobtrusive webcams scattered around the world, often ignored or unnoticed, there is the alternative phenomenon – that of the deliberately intrusive webcam. These are the cameras set up knowingly by users. They tend to fall into two main categories. Less common are those designed to record aspects of daily lives from the perspective of the user (such as a helmet-cam positioned on a bike rider as she takes her daily commute into town). More common are cameras positioned in locations where the person who has installed them can become part of the picture – or entire story – being shown

to viewers around the world. The 'camgirl' phenomenon is the most notable incarnation, in a broader category where people install one or more cameras to capture parts of their everyday life in places such as the bedroom, other areas of their home, or their workspaces. While they may occasionally show some morally debatable activities, the most controversial aspect when many of these cameras first became available for viewing was the mundane banality of many of the images. However, often conflated with these types of webcam offerings are the more sex-oriented or otherwise r-rated (i.e., age 18 plus) webcams which proliferate on the Web.

Probably because of the controversies which surrounded some of the early webcams featuring women courting the camera, and the skewed gender statistics (camgirls significantly outnumber camboys), most research has focused on motivations or implications for society (such as Senft, 2008). Other research has looked at webcams from cultural studies perspectives, exploring themes of gaze, desire and subjectivity as these relate to power and ethics (White, 2003). Such research is largely theoretical or philosophical. Very little empirical work has been done into the potential of webcams in domestic or office settings for visual research. We therefore finish this section with some suggestions for research.

Additional Suggestions for Research with Visual Data from Personal Webcams

With so much attention (or indignation) being given to the people in front of the camera, the obvious is being overlooked. That is, what can the actual settings tell us? These people are not usually acting in a studio – the cameras are giving us insights into the layouts, designs and decorations of their bedrooms, or living spaces, or offices. We can often see if they have pets, pot plants, photographs or other paraphernalia in their homes. We may be able to see the office layouts, technological features and space arrangements. Given that many of the webcam users will also give basic details of their lives, such as which city they live in, and what their living or working arrangements are, then we may be able to build up an analysis of the settings of webcam people, and look for similarities and differences between people of similar social categories.

Firstly, let us consider the objects that you can see in the backgrounds. Choose a publicly available personal webcam setting as your site for analysis, and analyse the objects that you can see in the same way that David Halle (Chapter 5) might do, looking for evidence of cultural beliefs, status indicators or other ideological indicators. If the site has more than one room to view, compare the rooms to see if there is consistency in the settings, objects and inferences. Then, if possible, compare your analysis with the information available on the site (such as the person's age, occupation, hobbies or other information they may have divulged for a public audience). Does the information you have analysed reveal a consistent life story? Are there consistencies or inconsistencies in the visual information on the Web?

Secondly, consider comparing the settings of different webcam people. Are there similarities between the settings? Do certain perspectives always get prioritized? In many personal webcam sites where multiple cameras are set up, one room which is often omitted is the bathroom. If we are supposedly living in a postmodern society where the boundaries between public and private are being broken down (even to the point where some webcam people leave the camera on when they are in bed and conducting various activities often associated with bedrooms), then why might bathrooms be off-limits? Is the new boundary not public–private but clean v. unclean, or sexual v. perfunctory bodily machinations? Do a comparison of different sites to see if certain areas of the house are consistently excluded, such as toilets, bathrooms or the laundry, and which areas of the house are almost always included. What can you conclude?

Finally, you may even be able to spend time just watching the coffee pot – that innocuous appliance which started the webcam phenomenon. After all, a lot can be learned by watching a coffee pot. How people pick it up, put it down, how they deal with the inevitability of its needing to be refilled. And whether they are smiling when they are doing so.

Conclusion

In this final chapter, we have looked at the various ways in which we can utilize the Internet to do visual research. While there are disparate themes – anonymity, impression management, place and space, webcams – the uniting feature is that the virtual world of the Internet is not separate from the 'real' world. It is grounded in the practices, habits and conventions that form part of everyday interaction, or from which we try to escape by going online for a few minutes, or hours, of the day. It is a technology which can mirror (and thus highlight) some of the fundamental divisions in global society; it can equally assist an astute social observer to discover some of the micro social habits and practices which pervade everyday life. The key to good visual research using the Internet is to accept that constant change is inevitable, but to constantly consider how we can capitalize on the abundance of unique opportunities for research which can be found in the virtual universe.

References

Adkins, B. and Nasarczyk, J. (2009) 'Asynchronicity and the "time-envelope" of online annotation: the case of the photo sharing website Flickr', *Australian Journal of Communication*, 36 (3): 115–140.

Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1979) [1947] *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.

Alba, V. (1966)'The Mexican revolution and the cartoon', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9: 121–136.

Alexander, J. C., Bartmanski, D. and Giesen, B. (2012) *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.

Alexander, V. D. (1994) 'The image of children in magazine advertisements from 1905 to 1990', *Communication Research*, 21 (6): 742–765.

Anden-Papadopoulos, K. (2009) 'US soldiers imagine the Iraq War on YouTube', *Popular Communication*, 7 (1): 17–27.

Anderson, N. (1923) *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Appadurai, A. (1988) *The Social Life of Things*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Babbie, E. (2010) *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage.

Baker, T. and Wang, C. (2006) 'Photovoice: use of a participatory action research method to explore the chronic pain experience in older adults', *Qualitative Health Research*, 16 (10): 1405–1413.

Bakken, D. (1977) 'Saying goodbye: an observational study of parting rituals', *Man-Environment Systems*, 7: 95–100.

Ball, M. and Smith, G. (1986) 'The visual availability of queueing's local organisation', *Communication and Culture*, 19 (1): 27–58.

Ball, M. and Smith, G. (1992) *Analyzing Visual Data*, Qualitative Research Methods Series No. 34. London: Sage.

Ball, M. and Smith, G. (2007) 'Technologies of realism? Ethnographic uses of photography and film', in P. Atkinson et al. (eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage. pp 301–319.

Ball, M. and Smith, G. (2011) 'Ethnomethodology and the visual: practices of looking, visualization and embodied action', in L. Pauwels and E. Margolis (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods.* London: Sage.

Banks, M. (1998) 'Visual anthropology: image, object and interpretation', in J. Prosser (ed.), *Image-Based Research: A Source Book for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Falmer Press. pp. 9–23.

Banks, M. (2007) *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, Vol. 4, Sage Qualitative Research Kit, ed. U. Flick. London: Sage.

Banks, M. and Morphy, H. (eds) (1997) *Rethinking Visual Anthropology.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Barthes, R. (1973) *Mythologies*. St Albans: Paladin.

Barthes, R. (1977a) 'The photographic message', in R. Barthes, *Image, Music Text*. London: Fontana.

Barthes, R. (1977b) 'Rhetoric of the image', in R. Barthes, *Image, Music Text*. London: Fontana.

Barthes, R. (1981) *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Hill and Wang.
Barthes, R. (1983) *The Fashion System*. New York: Hill and Wang.
Bartmanski, D. (2011) 'Successful icons of failed time: rethinking postcommunist nostalgia', *Acta Sociologica*, 54 (3): 213–231.
Bassett, E. and O'Riordan, K. (2002) 'Ethics of Internet research: contesting the human subjects research model', *Ethics of Information and Technology*, 4: 233–247.
Bates, J. and Martin, M. (1980) 'The thematic content of graffiti as a nonreactive indicator of male and female attitudes', *Journal of Sex Research*, 16 (4): 300–315.
Bateson, G. and Mead, M. (1942) *Balinese Character: A Photographic Analysis*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.
Becker, H. S. (1974) 'Photography and sociology', *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 1: 3–26.
Becker, H. S. (1981) *Exploring Society Photographically*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Becker, H. S. (1986) *Doing Things Together*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
Becker, H. S. (2002) 'Visual evidence: *A Seventh Man*, the specified generalization, and the work of the reader', *Visual Studies*, 17 (1): 3–11.
Bedford, V. (n.d.) 'Use of publicly available webcams in naturalistic observation studies', available at http://privacy.cs.cmu.edu/courses/dp1/fair/project16/paper.pdf (accessed 6 September 2011).
Bell, P. (2001) 'Content analysis of visual images', in T. van Leeuwen and C. Jewitt (eds), *Handbook of Visual Analysis*, London: Sage. pp. 10–34.
Bell, P. and Milic, M. (2002) 'Goffman's Gender Advertisements revisited: combining content analysis with semiotic analysis', *Visual Communication*, 1 (2): 203–222.
Benjamin, W. (1973) 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. and intro. H. Arendt. London: Fontana.
Bennett, T. (1995) *The Birth of the Museum*. London: Routledge.
Berger, J. and Mohr, J. (1975) *A Seventh Man: Migrant Workers in Europe*. New York: Viking Press.
Berry, B. (2006) 'Friends for better or worse: interracial friendship in the United States as seen through wedding party photos', *Demography*, 43 (3): 491–510.
Birdwhistell, R. (1970) *Kinesics and Context: Essays on Body Motion Communication*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Bounegru, L. and Forceville, C. (2011) 'Metaphors in editorial cartoons: representing the global financial crisis', *Visual Communication*, 10 (2): 209–229.
Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Bourdieu, P. (1990) 'The Kabyle house or the world reversed', in P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity. pp. 271–319.
Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Bourdieu, P., Boltanski, L., Castel, R. and Chamboredon, J.-D. (1990) *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Brookey, R. and Cannon, K. (2009) 'Sex lives in Second Life', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 26 (2): 145–164.
Broom, A. (2006) 'Ethical issues in social research', *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 14: 151–156.
Bruckman, A. (2002) 'Studying the amateur artist: a perspective on disguising data collected in human subjects research on the Internet', *Ethics and Information Technology*, 4 (3): 217–231.
Bryman, A. (2012) *Social Research Methods*, 4th Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bundy-Wright, M. (2010) 'Virtual presentations of the gendered self: an analysis of UQ Facebook group profile pictures', BA Honours thesis, School of Social Science, University of Queensland.

Burkhalter, B. (1999) 'Reading race online: discovering racial identity in Usenet discussions', in M. Smith and P. Kollock (eds), *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.

Cain, A. (1983) 'A study of pets in the family system', in A. Katcher and A. Beck (eds), *New Perspectives on our Lives with Companion Animals*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. pp. 71–81.

Calvey, D. (2008) 'The art and politics of covert research: doing "situated ethics" in the field'. *Sociology*, 42 (3): 905–918.

Campbell, C. (1997) 'Shopping, pleasure and the sex war', in P. Falk and C. Campbell (eds), *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage. pp. 166–176.

Carr, S., Francis, M., Rivlin, L. and Stone, A. (1992) *Public Space*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheung, C. (2000) 'A home on the Web: presentations of self on personal homepages', in D. Gauntlett (ed.), *Web Studies: Rewiring Media Studies for the Digital Age*. London: Arnold.

Chevalier, S. (1998) 'From woollen carpet to grass carpet: bridging house and garden in an English suburb', in D. Miller (ed.), *Material Cultures*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 47–72.

Chhabra, D., Healy, R. and Sills, E. (2003) 'Stage authenticity and heritage tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30 (3): 702–719.

Cintron, R. (1997) *Angels' Town*. Boston, MA: Beacon.

Clancy, S. and Dollinger, S. J. (1993) 'Photographic depictions of the self: gender and age differences in social connectedness', *Sex Roles*, 29 (7/8): 477–508.

Clifford, J. (1995) 'Paradise', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 11 (1): 92–117.

Cohen, E. (2011) 'The people of tourism cartoons', *Anatolia – An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 22 (3): 326–349.

Collier, J. Jr (1957) 'Photography in anthropology: a report on two experiments', *American Anthropologist*, 59: 843–859.

Collier, J. Jr (1967) *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Collier, J. Jr and Collier, M. (1986) *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Conley, D. and McCabe, B. (2011) 'Body mass index and physical attractiveness: evidence from a combination image-alteration/list experiment', *Sociological Methods and Research*, 40 (1): 6–31.

Conners, J. (2010) 'Barack versus Hilary: race, gender and political cartoon imagery of the 2008 Presidential Primaries', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 54 (3): 298–312.

Coupe, W. (1966) 'The German cartoon and the revolution of 1848', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9: 137–167.

Craik, J. (1994) *The Face of Fashion*. New York: Routledge.

Crutcher, M. and Zook, M. (2008) 'Placemarks and waterlines: racialized cyberscapes in post-Katrina Google Earth', *Geoforum*, 40: 523–534.

Dean, D. (1994) *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.

Debord, G. (1958) 'Theorie de la derivé', *Internationale Situationiste*, 2: 19–23.

Denis, J. and Pontille, D. (2010) 'Placing subway signs: practical properties of signs at work', *Visual Communication*, 9 (4): 441–462.

DeVane, B. and Squire, K. D. (2008) 'The meaning of race and violence in Grand Theft Auto', *Games and Culture*, 3 (3–4): 264–285.

DiBiase, R. and Gunnoe, J. (2004) 'Gender and culture differences in touching behavior', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 144 (1): 49–62.
Dingwall, R. (2006) 'Confronting the Anti-Democrats: the unethical nature of ethical regulation in social science', *Medical Sociology Online*, 1: 51–58.
Dodge, M. (2005) 'The role of maps in virtual research methods', in *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford: Berg.
Drew, S., Duncan, R. and Sawyer, S. (2010) 'Visual storytelling: a beneficial but challenging method for health research with young people', *Qualitative Health Research*, 20 (12): 1677–1688.
Edwards, E. (ed.) (1994) *Anthropology and Photography 1860–1920*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Edwards, E. (1997) 'Beyond the boundary', in M. Banks and H. Morphy (eds), *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Edwards, E. (2001) *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford: Berg.
Edwards, J. L. and Austin McDonald II, C. (2010) 'Reading Hilary and Sarah: contradictions of feminism and representation in 2008 campaign political cartoons', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 54 (3): 313–329.
Efron, D. (1972) [1941] *Gesture, Race and Culture.* The Hague: Mouton.
Ellison, N., Heino, R. and Gibbs, J. (2006) 'Managing impressions online: self-presentation processes in the online dating environment', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11 (2): 415–441.
Elsrud, T. (2001) 'Risk creation in traveling: backpacker adventure narration', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28 (3): 597–617.
Emmison, M. (1986) 'Visualising the economy: fetishism and the legitimation of economic life', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 3 (2): 81–97.
Emmison, M. and McHoul, A. W. (1987) 'Drawing on the economy: cartoon discourse and the production of a category', *Cultural Studies*, 1 (1): 93–112.
Enninger, W. (1984) 'Inferencing social structure and social processes from nonverbal behaviour', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 3 (2) 77–96.
Eysenbach, G. and Till, J. (2001) 'Ethical issues in qualitative research on Internet communities', *British Medical Journal*, 323 (7321): 1103–1105.
Falk, P. (1997) 'The scopic regime of shopping', in P. Falk and C. Campbell (eds), *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage.
Ferrell, J. (1993) *Crimes of Style: Urban Graffiti and the Politics of Criminality*. New York: Garland.
Fiske, J., Hodge, B. and Turner, G. (1987) *Myths of Oz: Reading Australian Popular Culture. S*ydney: Allen & Unwin.
Foucault, M. (1973) *The Birth of the Clinic*. London: Tavistock.
Foucault, M. (1979) *Discipline and Punish*. London: Penguin.
Fuller, G. (2002) 'The arrow – directional semiotics: wayfinding in transit', *Social Semiotics*, 12 (3): 231–244.
Gardner, C. (1980) 'Passing by: street remarks, address rights, and the urban female', *Sociological Inquiry*, 50 (3/4): 328–356.
Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Garfinkel, H. and Livingstone, E. (2003) 'Phenomenal field properties of order in formatted queues and their neglected standing in the current situation of inquiry', *Visual Studies*, 18 (1): 21–28.
Gibson, D. R. (2008) 'Doing time in space: line-joining rules and resultant morphologies', *Sociological Forum*, 23 (2): 207–233.
Girardin, F., Blat, J., Calabrese, F., Dal Fiore, F. and Ratti, C. (2008) 'Digital footprinting: uncovering tourists with user-generated content', *Pervasive Computing*, 7 (4): 36–43.

Gobo, G. (2011) 'Ethnography', in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Issues of Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage.
Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books.
Goffman, E. (1961) *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday.
Goffman, E. (1963) *Behavior in Public Places: Notes on the Social Organization of Gatherings*. New York: Free Press.
Goffman, E. (1971) *Relations in Public: Micro Studies of the Public Order*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin.
Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Goffman, E. (1979) *Gender Advertisements*. London: Macmillan.
Gombrich, E. (1996) 'The visual image: its place in communication', in R. Woodfield (ed.), *The Essential Gombrich: Selected Writings on Art and Culture*. London: Phaidon.
Goode, E. (1996) 'The ethics of deception in social research: a case study', *Qualitative Sociology*, 19 (1): 11–33.
Goodwin, C. (1986) 'Gestures as a resource for the organization of mutual orientation', *Semiotica*, 62 (1–2): 29–49.
Gorsky, M., Krajewski-Siuda, K., Dutka, W. and Berridge, V. (2010) 'Anti-alcohol posters in Poland, 1945–1989: diverse meanings, uncertain effects', *American Journal of Public Health*, 100 (11): 2059–2069.
Gottdiener, M. (1995) *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
Grady, J. (2006) 'Visual sociology', *21st Sociology: A Reference Handbook*. London Sage.
Grady, J. (2007) 'Advertising images as social indicators: depictions of blacks in Life magazine, 1936–2000', *Visual Studies*, 22 (3): 211–239.
Graham, M. (2010) 'Neogeography and the palimpsests of place: Web 2.0 and the construction of a virtual Earth', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 101 (4): 422–436.
Graham, M. and Zook, M. (2011) 'Visualizing global cyberscapes: mapping user-generated placemarks', *Journal of Urban Technology*, 18 (1): 115–132.
Green, J. A. (2003) 'The writing on the stall: gender and graffiti', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 22 (3): 282–296.
Grossman, L. (2010) 'Person of the Year 2010: Mark Zuckerberg', *Time Magazine*, 15 December 2010, available at http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037183_2037185-4,00.html.
Haggerty, K. (2004) 'Ethics creep: governing social science research in the name of ethics', *Qualitative Sociology*, 27 (4): 391–414.
Hall, E. (1959) *The Silent Language*. New York: Doubleday.
Hall, E. (1966) *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday.
Hall, E. (1974) 'Handbook for proxemic research', *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, No. 3: 2–124.
Hall, S. (1973) 'The determinations of news photographs', in S. Cohen and J. Young (eds), *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media*. London: Constable.
Hall, S. (1991) 'Reconstruction work: images of post-war black settlement', in J. Spence and P. Holland (eds), *The Meanings of Domestic Photography*. London: Virago.
Hall, S. (ed.) (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage (in association with The Open University).
Hall, S., Hobson, D., Lowe, A. and Willis, P. (eds) (1980) *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson.

Halle, D. (1993) *Inside Culture: Art and Class in the American Home*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Hamilton, P. (1997) 'Representing the social: France and Frenchness in post-war humanist photography', in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practice*. London: Sage.
Hancock, J. and Toma, C. (2009) 'Putting your best foot forward: the accuracy of online dating photographs', *Journal of Communication*, 59: 367–386.
Harper, D. (1988) 'Visual sociology: expanding sociological vision', *American Sociologist*, Spring: 54–70.
Harper, D. (1998) 'An argument for visual sociology', in J. Prosser (ed.), *Image-Based Research: A Source Book for Qualitative Researchers*. London: Falmer.
Harper, D. (2002) 'Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation', *Visual Studies*, 17 (1): 13–26.
Harper, D. (2005) 'What's new visually?', in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Hasell, M. J. and Peatross, F. D. (1990) 'Exploring connections between women's changing roles and house forms', *Environment and Behaviour*, 22 (1): 3–26.
Heath, C. and Hindmarsh, J. (2007) 'Video-based studies of work practice', *Sociology Compass*, 1 (1): 156–173.
Heath, C. and von Lehn, D. (2004) 'Configuring reception: (dis-)regarding the 'spectator' in museums and galleries', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21 (6): 43–65.
Heath, C. and Luff, P. (2007) 'Ordering competition: the interactional accomplishment of the sale of art and antiques at auction', *British Journal of Sociology*, 58 (1): 63–85.
Heath, C., Luff, P., von Lehn, D., Hindmarsh, J. and Cleverly, J. (2002) 'Crafting participation: designing ecologies, configuring experience', *Visual Communication*, 1 (1): 9–33.
Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J. and Luff, P. (2010) *Video in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
Heath, S. and Cleaver, E. (2004) 'Mapping the spatial in shared household life: a missed opportunity?', in C. Knowles and P. Sweetman (eds), *Picturing the Social Landscape: Visual Methods in the Sociological Imagination*. New York: Routledge. pp. 65–78.
Henny, L. (1986) 'A short history of visual sociology', *Current Sociology*, 34 (3): 1–4.
Heritage, J. C. (1989) 'Current developments in conversation analysis', in D. Roger and P. Bull (eds), *Conversation: An Interdisciplinary Approach*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. pp. 21–47.
Heslin, R. (1974) 'Steps towards a taxonomy of touching', Conference paper cited in V. Richmond et al. (1991) *Nonverbal Behaviour in Interpersonal Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. p. 140.
Hirschauer, S. (2005) 'On doing being a stranger: the practical constitution of civil inattention'. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 35 (1): 41–67.
Hockings, P. (ed.) (1975) *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton.
Hookway, N. (2008) 'Entering the blogosphere: some strategies for using blogs in social research', *Qualitative Research*, 8 (1): 91–113.
Hoser, B. and Nitschke, T. (2010) 'Questions on ethics for research in the virtually connected world', *Social Networks*, 32 (3): 180–186.
Hoult, T. (1954) 'Experimental measurement of clothing as a factor in some social ratings of selected American men', *American Sociological Review*, 19: 324–328.
Hudson, J. and Bruckman, A. (2004) '"Go away": participant objections to being studied and the ethics of chatroom research', *Information Society*, 20: 127–139.
Humphreys, L. (1975) *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. Chicago: Aldine.
Hurdley, R. (2010) 'Dismantling mantelpieces: narrating identities and materializing culture in the home', *Sociology*, 40 (4): 717–733.

Jackson, P. and Thrift, N. (1995) 'Geographies of consumption', in D. Miller (ed.), *Acknowledging Consumption*. London: Routledge. pp. 204–237.

Jacobs, N., Burgin, W., Fridrich, N., Abrams, A., Miskell, B., Braswell, B., Richardson, A. and Pless, R. (2009) 'The global network of outdoor webcams: properties and applications', GIS'09: 17th ACM SIGSPATIAL International Conference on Advances in Geographic Information Systems, Seattle, November 4–6, 2009.

Jameson, F. (1993) *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Johnsen, S., May, J. and Cloke, P. (2008) 'Imag(in)ing "Homeless places": using auto-photography to (re)examine the geographies of homelessness', *Area*, 40 (2): 194–207.

Kaite, B. (1989) 'Reading the body textual: the shoe and fetish relations in soft and hard core', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 6 (4): 79–93.

Kamptner, N. L. (1995) 'Treasured possessions and their meanings in adolescent males and females', *Adolescence*, 30 (2): 301–318.

Katz, J. (1988) *Seductions of Crime*. New York: Basic Books.

Kazdin, A. (1979) 'Direct observations as unobtrusive measures in treatment evaluation', in L. Sechrest (ed.), *Unobtrusive Measurement Today.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 19–31.

Kellehear, A. (1993) *The Unobtrusive Researcher: A Guide to Methods*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.

Kelling, G. and Coles, C. (1996) *Fixing Broken Windows*. New York: Martin Kessler.

Kelly, M. (2010) 'Clothes, culture and context: female clothes in Kuwait', *Fashion Theory*, 14 (2): 215–236.

Kendall, L. (1998) 'Meaning and identity in "Cyberspace": the performance of gender, class and race online', *Symbolic Interaction*, 21 (2): 129–153.

Kendon, A. (2004) *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kendon, A. and Ferber, A. (1973) 'A description of some human greetings', in R. P. Michael and J. H. Crook (eds), *Comparative Ecology and Behaviour of Primates*. New York: Academic Press.

Kinsey, S., Pomeroy, W., Martin, C. and Gebhard, P. (1953) *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*. Philadelphia: Saunders.

Kitazawa, Y. (1999) 'The accountability of hand-drawn maps and rendering practices', *Human Studies*, 22 (2/4): 299–314.

Klein, Z. (1984) 'Sitting posture in males and females', *Semiotica*, 48 (1–2): 119–131.

Klofas, J. and Cutshall, C. (1985) 'Unobtrusive research methods in criminal justice: using graffiti in the reconstruction of institutional cultures', *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 22 (4): 355–373.

Knoblauch, H., Schnettler, B., Raab, J. and Soffner, H.-G. (eds) (2006) *Video Analysis: Methodology and Methods*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

Knorr Cetina, K. and Bruegger, U. (2000) 'The market as an object of attachment: exploring postsocial relations in financial markets', *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 25 (2): 141–168.

Krase, J. (2006) 'Visualizing ethic vernacular landscapes in American cities', *Research in Urban Policy*, 10: 63–84.

Krase, J. (2007) 'Visualisation du changement urbain', *Societes*, 95 (1): 65–87.

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (1996) *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design.* London. Routledge.

Kriznar, N. (1993) 'Visual symbols of national identity: Slovene bumper stickers and the collective unconscious', *Visual Sociology*, 8 (1): 58–63.

LaFrance, M. and Mayo, C. (1978) *Moving Bodies: Nonverbal Communication in Social Relationships*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Lakoff, R. (1975) *Language and Women's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.

Larsen, J. (2005) 'Performativity of tourist photography', *Space and Culture*, 8 (4): 416–434.
Laurier, E. (2004) 'Doing office work on the motorway', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21 (4/5): 261–277.
Lawson, B. (2001) *The Language of Space.* Oxford: Architectural Press.
Lehtonen, T.-K. and Maenpaa, P. (1997) 'Shopping in the East Centre Mall', in P. Falk and C. Campbell (eds), *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage. pp. 136–165.
Lidchi, H. (1997) 'The poetics and politics of exhibiting other cultures', in S. Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage. pp. 151–222.
Livingstone, E. (1987) *Making Sense of Ethnomethodology*. London: Routledge.
Livingstone, E. (2008) 'Context and detail in studies of witnessable social order: puzzles, maps, checkers and geometry', *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40: 840–862.
Llewellyn, N. and Hindmarsh, J. (eds) (2010) *Organisation, Interaction and Practice: Studies in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Loewenstine, H., Ponticos, G. and Paludi, M. (1982) 'Sex differences in graffiti as a communication style', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 117: 307–308.
Lofland, L. (1973) *A World of Strangers*. New York: Basic Books.
Longhurst, R. (2009) 'YouTube: a new space for birth', *Feminist Review*, 93: 46–63.
Luff, P., Hindmarsh, J. and Heath, C. (eds) (2000) *Workplace Studies: Recovering Work Practice and Informing System Design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lutz, C. and Collins, J. (1993) *Reading National Geographic.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Lynch, K. (1960) *The Image of the City*. Cambridge, MA: Technology Press.
MacCannell, D. (1973) 'Staged Authenticity: arrangements of social space in tourist settings', *American Journal of Sociology*, 79 (3): 589–603
MacCannell, D. (1989) 'Faking it: comment on face-work in pornography', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 6 (4): 153–174.
MacMaster, T. (n.d.) 'A gay girl in Damascus', available at http://damascusgaygirl.blogspot.com (accessed 13 June 2011).
Malinowski, B. (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
Mann, L. (1969) 'Queue culture: the waiting line as a social system', *American Journal of Sociology*, 75: 340–354.
Manzo, J. (2005) 'Social control and the management of personal space in shopping malls', *Space and Culture*, 8 (1): 83–97.
Marcuse, H. (1968) *One Dimensional Man*. London: Sphere.
Mayall, M. (2006) "'Seeing the market": technical analysis in trading styles', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 36 (2): 119–140.
Mayall, M. (2008) 'From seeing the market to marketing the seeing: technical analysis as a second-order epistemic consumption object', *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 11 (3): 207–224.
McHoul, A. (1991) 'Taking the children: some reflections at a distance on the camera and Dr Barnado' *Continuum*, 5 (1): 33–50.
Mead, M. (1975) 'Visual anthropology in a discipline of words', in P. Hockings (ed). *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton.
Melbin, M. (1978) 'Night as frontier', *American Sociological Review*, 43 (Feb): 3–22.
Milgram, S. (1963) 'Behavioral study of obedience', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67 (4): 371–378.
Miller, D. (1988) 'Appropriating the state on the council estate', *Man*, 23: 353–372.
Miller, T. and McHoul, A. (1998) *Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Sage
Morgan, T. (1989) 'A whip of one's own: dominatrix pornography and the construction of a post-modern (female) subjectivity', *American Journal of Semiotics*, 6 (4): 109–136.

Morley, D. (1995) 'Television: not so much a visual medium, more a visible object', in C. Jenks (ed.), *Visual Culture*. London: Routledge. pp. 170–189.
Muller, M. and Özcan, E. (2007) 'The political iconography of Muhammad cartoons: understanding cultural conflict and political action', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 40 (2): 287–291.
Myers, J. (1992) 'Nonmainstream body modification: genital piercing, branding, burning and cutting', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 21 (3): 267–306.
Nash, J. (1982) 'The family camps out: a study in nonverbal communication', *Semiotica*, 39 (3–4): 331–341.
Neuman, W. L. (2011) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Pearson.
Newhagen, J. E. and Ancell, M. (1995) 'The expression of emotion and social status in the language of bumper stickers', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 14 (3): 312–323.
Newman, J. and McCauley, C. (1977) 'Eye contact with strangers in city, suburb and small town', *Environment and Behaviour*, 9 (4): 547–548.
Nir, Y. (1977) 'US involvement in the Middle East conflict in Soviet caricatures', *Journalism Quarterly*, 54: 697–726.
Norris, C., McCahill, M. and Wood, D. (2004) 'Editorial. The growth of CCTV: a global perspective on the international diffusion of video surveillance in publicly accessible space', *Surveillance & Society*, 2 (2/3): 110–135.
Norton, R. (1983) *Communicator Style: Theory, Applications and Measures*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
O'Brien, J. (1999) 'Writing in the body: gender (re)production in online interaction', in M. Smith and P. Kollock (eds), *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge. pp. 76–104.
Ogilvie, E. (1995) 'An ethnography of corporeality and sexual difference within the gym', BA Honours thesis, School of Social Science, University of Queensland.
Oliffe, J. and Bottorff, J. (2007) 'Further than the eye can see? Photo elicitation and research with men', *Qualitative Health Research*, 17 (6): 850–858.
Olivola, C. and Todorov, A. (2010) 'Fooled by first impressions', *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 46: 315–324.
Osbaldiston, N. and Petray, T. (2011) 'The role of horror and dread in the sacred experience', *Tourist Studies*, 11 (2): 175–190.
O'Toole, P. and Were, P. (2008) 'Observing places: using space and material culture in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 8 (5): 616–634.
Packard, J. (2008) '"I'm gonna show you what it's really like out here": the power and limitation of participatory visual methods', *Visual Studies*, 23 (1): 63–77.
Papson, S., Goldman, R. and Kersey, N. (2007) 'The precarious blend of narrative, aesthetics, and social theory', in G. Stanczak (ed.), *Visual Research Methods: Image, Society and Representation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Pauwels, L. (2005) 'Websites as visual and multimodal cultural expressions: opportunities and issues of online hybrid media research', *Media, Culture and Society*, 27 (4): 604–613.
Pauwels, L. (ed.) (2006) *Visual Cultures of Science: Rethinking Representational Practices in Knowledge Building and Science Communication*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England.
Pauwels, L. (2008) 'A private visual practice going public? Social functions and sociological research opportunities of Web-based family photography', *Visual Studies*, 23 (1): 34–49.
Pauwels, L. (2010) 'Visual sociology reframed: an analytical synthesis and discussion of visual methods in social and cultural research', *Sociological Methods & Research*, 38 (4): 545–581.

Pauwels, L. and Margolis, E. (eds) (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research Methods.* London: Sage.
Phoenix, C. (2010) 'Auto-photography in aging studies: exploring issues of identity construction in mature body-builders', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 24: 167–180.
Pink, S. (2006) *The Future of Visual Anthropology: Engaging the Senses*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Pink, S. (2007) *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, 2nd Edition, London: Sage.
Poll, S. (1962) *The Hasidic Community of Williamsburg*. New York: Free Press.
Pratt, J. (2002) *Punishment and Civilization*. London: Sage.
Prior, L. (1998) 'The architecture of the hospital: a study of spatial organization and medical knowledge', *British Journal of Sociology*, 39 (1): 86–113.
Prosser, J. (2008) 'The darker side of visual research', ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, Working Paper 9.
Prosser, J. and Loxley, A. (2008) 'Introducing visual methods', ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper, available at http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/420/1/MethodsReviewPaperNCRM-010.pdf (accessed 23 February 2012).
Psathas, G. (1979) 'Organizational features of direction maps', in G. Psathas (ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*. New York: Irvington. pp. 203–225.
Quimby, M. (ed.) (1978) *Material Culture and the Study of American Life*. New York: Norton.
Raento, P. and Meuronen, M. (2011) 'Virtues of visualization: gambling in Finnish editorial cartoons', *International Gambling Studies*, 11 (1): 107–120.
Ramirez, M. (2006) '"My dog's just like me": dog ownership as a gender display', *Symbolic Interaction*, 29 (3): 373–391.
Rathje, W. (1979) 'Trace measures', in L. Sechrest (ed.), *Unobtrusive Measurement Today*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
Richardson, J. and Kroeber, A. (1940) 'Three centuries of women's dress fashions: a quantitative analysis', *Anthropological Records*, 5 (2): 111–153.
Richins, M. L. (1994) 'Special possessions and the expression of material values', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21 (3): 522–533.
Richmond, V., McCroskey, J. and Payne, S. (1991) *Nonverbal Behaviour in Interpersonal Relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Riggins, S. H. (1994) 'Fieldwork in the living room', in S. H. Riggins (ed.), *The Socialness of Things*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 101–148.
Riley, A. (2008) 'On the role of images in the construction of narratives about the crash of United Airlines flight 93', *Visual Studies*, 23 (1): 4–19.
Robbins, K. (2008) 'The Hostess Project', *Journal of Visual Culture*, 7 (3): 335–348.
Robins, D., Sanders, C. and Cahill, S. (1991) 'Dogs and their people: pet facilitated interaction in a public setting', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 20 (1): 3–25.
Robinson, D. (1976) 'Fashions in shaving and trimming of the beard: the men of the Illustrated London News, 1842–1972', *American Journal of Sociology*, 81 (5): 1133–1141.
Rose, G. (2004) '"Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice": the emotional geography of some mums and their family photos', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5 (4): 549–564.
Rose, G. (2007) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, 2nd Edition. London: Sage.
Rose, N. (2006) *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Rosenblatt, D. (1997) 'The antisocial skin: structure, resistance and "Modern Primitive" adornment in the United States', *Cultural Anthropology*, 12 (3): 287–334.

Rubinstein, R. (1995) *Dress Codes*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Ryan, C. and Stewart, M. (2009) 'Eco-tourism and luxury – the case of Al Maha, Dubai'. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17 (3), 287–301.
Ryave, L. and Schenkein, J. (1974) 'Notes on the art of walking', in R. Turner (ed.), *Ethnomethodology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. 1, ed. G. Jefferson, intro. E. Schegloff. Oxford: Blackwell.
Salesses, P., DeVincenzi, A., Martino, M. and Hidalgo, C. (2011) 'Place Pulse: which place looks safer?', available at http://pulse.media.mit.edu/ (accessed 11 October 2011).
Sanders, T. (2005) 'Researching the online sex work community', in C. Hine (ed.), *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford: Berg.
Savage, M. and Burrows, R. (2009) 'Some further reflections on the coming crisis of empirical sociology', *Sociology*, 43 (4): 762–772.
Schegloff, E. A. (1988) 'Goffman and the analysis of conversation', in P. Drew and T. Wootton (eds), *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order*. Cambridge: Polity. pp. 89–135.
Schlereth, T. (1985) *Material Culture: A Research Guide*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.
Schwartz, D. (1989) 'Visual ethnography: using photography in qualitative research', *Qualitative Sociology*, 12 (2): 119–154.
Scott, J. (1991) *A Matter of Record: Documentary Sources in Social Research*. Cambridge: Polity.
Sechrest, L. and Flores, L. (1969) 'Homosexuality in the Philippines and the United States: the handwriting on the wall', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 79: 3–12.
Sechrest, L. and Phillips, M. (1979) 'Unobtrusive measures: an overview', in L. Sechrest (ed.), *Unobtrusive Measurement Today. S*an Francisco: Jossey-Bass. pp. 1–17.
Senft, T. (2008) *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks*. New York: Peter Lang.
Shanas, E. (1945) 'The AJS through fifty years', *American Journal of Sociology*, 50: 522–533.
Sharples, M., Davison, L., Thomas, G. and Rudman, P. (2003) 'Children as photographers: an analysis of children's photographic behaviour and intentions at three age levels', *Visual Communication*, 2 (3): 303–330.
Sharrock, W. and Anderson, D. (1979) 'Directional hospital signs as sociological data', *Information Design Journal*, 1 (2): 81–94.
Shields, R. (1994) 'The logic of the mall', in S. Riggins (ed.), *The Socialness of Things*. New York: Mouton de Gruyter. pp. 203–229.
Simmel, G. (1921) [1908] 'Sociology of the senses: visual interaction', in R. Park and E. Burgess (eds), *Introduction to the Science of Sociology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 356–361.
Simmel, G. (1957) [1904] 'Fashion', *American Journal of Sociology*, 62: 541–558.
Smith, M. and Kollock, P. (eds) (1999) *Communities in Cyberspace*. London: Routledge.
Smith, P. (1986) 'Trekking tourism in Nepal', MA thesis, University of Edinburgh.
Smith, P. (2008) *Punishment and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Smith, P. (2011) 'Becoming iconic: the cases of Woodstock and Bayreuth', in J. Alexander et al. (eds), *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 171–183.
Spencer, S. (2011) *Visual Research Methods in the Social Sciences: Awakening Visions*. Abingdon: Routledge.
Sproull, L. and Kiesler, S. (1986) 'Reducing social context cues: electronic mail in organizational communication', *Management Science*, 32 (11): 1492–1512.

Stasz, C. (1979) 'The early history of visual sociology', in J. Wagner (ed.), *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. pp. 119–136.

Strano, M. (2008) 'User descriptions and interpretations of self-presentation through Facebook profile images', *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 2 (2), article 1, available at http://cyberpsychology.eu/view.php?cisloclanku=2008110402&article=1 (accessed 12 July 2012).

Streeck, J. (2009) *Gesturecraft: The Manufacture of Meaning*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Streicher, L. (1966) 'On a theory of political caricature', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 9: 427–445.

Sturken, M. and Cartwright, L. (2009) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Synnott, A. (1985) 'Symbolic replica: a sociology of cemeteries', *International Journal of Visual Sociology*, 3 (2): 46–56.

Synnott, A. (1993) *The Body Social*. London: Routledge.

Szarota, P. (2010) 'The mystery of the European smile: a comparison based on individual photographs provided by internet users', *Journal of Nonverbal Behaviour*, 34: 249–256.

Tagg, J. (1988) *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. London: Macmillan.

Timothy, D. and Groves, D. (2001) 'Research note: webcam images as potential data sources for tourism research', *Tourism Geographies*, 3 (4): 394–404.

Trachtenberg, A. (ed.) (1980) *Classic Essays on Photography*. New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books.

Vaillancourt, T. and Sharma, A. (2011) 'Intolerance of sexy peers: intrasexual competition among women', *Aggressive Behavior*, 37: 569–577.

Veblen, T. (1912) *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Macmillan.

Wagner, J. (ed.) (1979) *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Wagner, J. (2002) 'Contrasting images, complementary trajectories: sociology, visual sociology and visual research', *Visual Studies*, 17 (2): 160–171.

Wagner-Pacifici, R. and Schwartz, B. (1991) 'The Vietnam Veterans' Memorial', *American Journal of Sociology*, 97: 376–420.

Walker, M. (1978) *Daily Sketches: A Cartoon History of British Political Cartoons.* London: Granada.

Wall, M. (2009) 'Africa on YouTube: musicians, tourists, missionaries and aid workers', *International Communication Gazette*, 71 (5): 393–407.

Wallendorf, M. and Arnould, E. J. (1988) 'My favorite things: a cross-cultural inquiry into object attachment, possessiveness and social linkage', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14 (4): 531–547.

Waskul, D. and Martin, J. (2010) 'Now the orgy is over', *Symbolic Interaction*, 33 (2): 297–318.

Weaver, S. (2010) 'Liquid racism and the Danish Prophet Muhammad cartoons', *Current Sociology*, 58 (5): 675–692.

Webb, E. D., Campbell, D. T., Schwartz, R. and Sechrest, L. (1973) *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Research in the Social Sciences*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Welch, M. and Macuare, M. (2011) 'Penal tourism in Argentina: bridging Foucauldian and neo-Durkheimian perspectives', *Theoretical Criminology*, 15 (4): 401–425.

White, M. (2003) 'Too close to see: men, women and webcams', *New Media and Society*, 5 (1): 7–28.

White, M. (2010) 'Listing eBay masculinity: erotic exchanges and regulation in "gay" and "gay interest" underwear and swimwear auctions', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 19 (1): 43–58.

Whitty, M. (2008) 'Revealing the "real" me, searching for the "actual" you: presentations of self on an Internet dating site', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24 (4): 1707–1723.

Whyte, W. (1980) *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. New York: Project for Public Spaces.

Wiles, R., Prosser, J., Bagnoli, A., Clark, A., Davies, K., Holland, S. and Renold, E. (2008) 'Visual ethics: ethical issues in visual research', ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper, University of Southampton, October 2008, available at http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/421/.

Wilkin, A. and Liamputtong, P. (2010) 'The photovoice method: researching the experiences of Aboriginal health workers through photographs', *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 16: 231–239.

Willis, P. (1978) *Profane Culture*. London: Routledge.

Wilson, J. and Kelling, G. (1982) 'Broken windows', *Atlantic Monthly*, 249 (3): 29–38.

Wilson, J. Z. (2008) 'Pecking orders: power relationships and gender in Australian prison graffiti', *Ethnography*, 9 (1): 99–121.

Woodward, I. (2001) 'Domestic objects and the taste epiphany: a resource for consumption methodology', *Journal of Material Culture*, 6 (2): 115–136.

Woodward, I., Emmison, M. and Smith, P. (2000) 'Postmodern space and human disorientation: a modest test of an immodest theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, 51 (2): 339–354.

Workman, J. E. and Johnson, K. P. (1991) 'The role of cosmetics in attributions about sexual harassment', *Sex Roles*, 24 (11/12): 759–769.

Worth, S. and Adair, J. (1972) *Through Navajo Eyes: An Exploration in Film Communication and Anthropology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wright, C. Y., Darko, N., Standen, P. J. and Patel, T. G. (2010) 'Visual research methods: using cameras to empower socially excluded black youth', *Sociology*, 44 (3): 541–558.

Wright, R. A. (1989) 'The "friendly student" exercise', *Teaching Sociology*, 17: 484–488.

Yurchison, J., Watchravesringkan, K. and McCabe, D. (2005) 'An exploration of identity re-creation in the context of internet dating', *Social Behavior and Personality*, 33 (8): 735–750.

Zhao, S., Grasmuck, S. and Martin, J. (2008) 'Identity construction on Facebook: digital empowerment in anchored relationships', *Computers in Human Behavior*, 24: 1816–1836.

Ziller, R. C. (1990) *Photographing the Self: Methods for Observing Personal Orientations*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ziller, R. C. and Rorer, B. A. (1985) 'Shyness-environment interaction: a view from the shy side through auto-photography', *Journal of Personality*, 53: 626–639.

Zwick, D. and Dholakia, N. (2006) 'Bringing the market to life: screen aesthetics and the epistemic consumption object', *Marketing Theory*, 6 (1): 41–62.

Index