



SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University

EXPERT COMMITTEE

Prof. Kameshwar
Choudhary
Ambedkar University,
Lucknow

Prof. Biswajit Das
Centre for Media, Culture and
Governance, Jamia Milia Islamia
University, New Delhi

Prof. Pushpesh Kumar
Dept. of Sociology
Hyderabad Central University
Telangana

Dr. Swati Sachdeva
Sikkim University
Sikkim

Dr. Nishi Mitra
TISS, Mumbai

Prof. Debal Singha Roy
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Tribhuvan Kapur
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Nita Mathur
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Archana Singh
Discipline of Sociology,
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Rabindra Kumar
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. R. Vashum
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

COURSE COORDINATORS

Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi
SOSS, IGNOU

GENERAL EDITOR

Dr. Reema Bhatia
Delhi University

COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

Unit		Writer
Block 1	Introduction to the Sociological Study of the Visual	Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi (In-house Editor)
Unit 1	Understanding Society Through the Visual	Dr. Reema Bhatia, Miranda House, Delhi University
Unit 2	Making Sense of Visuals	Ms. Deepali Aparajita, Independent Scholar
Block 2	Sociology and the Practice of Photography	Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi (In-house Editor)
Unit 3	Image Making Through Photography	Dr. Nivedita Ghosh, JMC, Delhi University
Unit 4	Photography, Self and Society	Ms. Moureen Kalita, Independent Scholar
Unit 5	Photography as a Tool of Research	Ms. Moureen Kalita, Independent Scholar
Block 3	Video and Film in Sociology of Society	Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi (In-house Editor)
Unit 6	Representing Through Video and Film	Dr. Reema Bhatia, Miranda College, Delhi University
Unit 7	Film and Video as a Research Tool	Dr. Shivani Rajput, Miranda House, Delhi University
Block 4	Sociology, Multimedia and Hypermedia	Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi (In-house Editor)
Unit 8	Society, Multimedia and Hypermedia	Dr. Rituparna Patgiri, IP College, Delhi University
Unit 9	Multimedia and Hypermedia as a Tool of Research	Dr. Rituparna Patgiri, IP College, Delhi University

Cover Design: R.K. Enterprises

Academic Consultants: Dr. Vinod Kumar Yadav and Ms. Vandana Sharma

PRINT PRODUCTION

Mr. Rajiv Girdhar
Assistant Registrar
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

Mr. Hemant Parida
Section Officer
MPDD, IGNOU, New Delhi

September, 2021

© Indira Gandhi National Open University, 2021

ISBN:

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeography or any other means, without permission in writing from the Indira Gandhi National Open University.

Further information on the Indira Gandhi National Open University courses may be obtained from the University's Office at Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110 068 or visit our website: <http://www.ignou.ac.in>

Printed and published on behalf of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, by Registrar, MPDD, IGNOU.

Laser Typeset by : Tessa Media & Computers, C-206, A.F.E.-II, Okhla, New Delhi

Printed at :



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

Contents

	Page No
BLOCK 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE VISUAL	9
Unit 1 Understanding Society Through the Visual	11
Unit 2 Making Sense of Visuals	24
BLOCK 2 SOCIOLOGY AND THE PRACTICE OF PHOTOGRAPHY	37
Unit 3 Image Making Through Photography	39
Unit 4 Photography, Self and Society	51
Unit 5 Photography as a Tool of Research	62
BLOCK 3 VIDEO AND FILM IN SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIETY	73
Unit 6 Representing Through Video and Film	75
Unit 7 Film and Video as a Research Tool	89
BLOCK 4 SOCIOLOGY, MULTIMEDIA AND HYPERMEDIA	103
Unit 8 Society, Multimedia and Hypermedia	105
Unit 9 Multimedia and Hypermedia as a Tool of Research	115
GLOSSARY	125
FURTHER READINGS	126

COURSE INTRODUCTION: SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL

The visual aspects of society are a universal and integral part of all cultures. The visual aspects of society comprise of materials like pictorial signs, photographs, films, design elements, ritual performances and various kinds of art forms. In contemporary societies visuals are both abundant and universal. They are a part of our everyday lives and our cultures. With technological advancement we have witnessed the newer forms of visual forms- photographs, films, video clips etc. With growth of social media platforms we find these visuals forms have become increasingly interwoven with our daily lives and identities. Since visuals permeate all spheres of our social life they become an important site of research especially ethnographic research. It is difficult to isolate ethnographic research from the visuals. In ethnography the images are inevitable as sounds, words or any medium of cultural expression.

This course seeks to explore how various visual mediums are used for research purposes and also how visuality in society is analysed both in terms of how visual data is generated and how these visuals mediums represent society and its people. This course intends to train students in the specialised technique of conducting visual research and analysis of visual data. It focuses on the broad fields of Photography, Film and Multimedia as significant tools, used in contemporary research practices.

Block 1: Introduction to the Sociological Study of the Visual

Under this theme or block we introduce students to a brief overview of sociologist's and social anthropologist's study of visuals. Unit, 1 of this block titled: Understanding society through the visual. In this unit we have focussed on understanding the ways in which the use of visual methods in ethnographic research has developed. The approach to research based on visual methods has mirrored the paradigmatic development in theory. The shift in anthropological theory, broadly from an evolutionary to positivist to a reflexive mode of analysis is also reflected in the analysis of the visual. Research is also influenced by the identities of the researcher and the informants, which is another aspect that is discussed in this unit. The role of the researcher as a neutral observer who does not influence the outcome of research has been questioned. The assumption that what we discover in the field cannot be known beforehand has dominated research. However, what we see is also an outcome of what we seek to discover. In the second unit we familiarise ourselves with works of anthropologist and sociologist who made use of visuals, mostly photographs and ethnographic film. In tracing the trajectory of ethnographic film, the unit raises some pertinent problems with visual representation.

Block 2: Sociology and the Practice of Photography

In this block we focus our attention specifically on photography as visual aid in research and as source of representation. The first unit of this block we explore some of the uses of film in early anthropological work. In this unit, we began with going through a brief history of Ethnographic filmmaking and its relationship to anthropological research. In the subsequent section, we looked at the main steps involved in making ethnographic films, delving closely at the question of

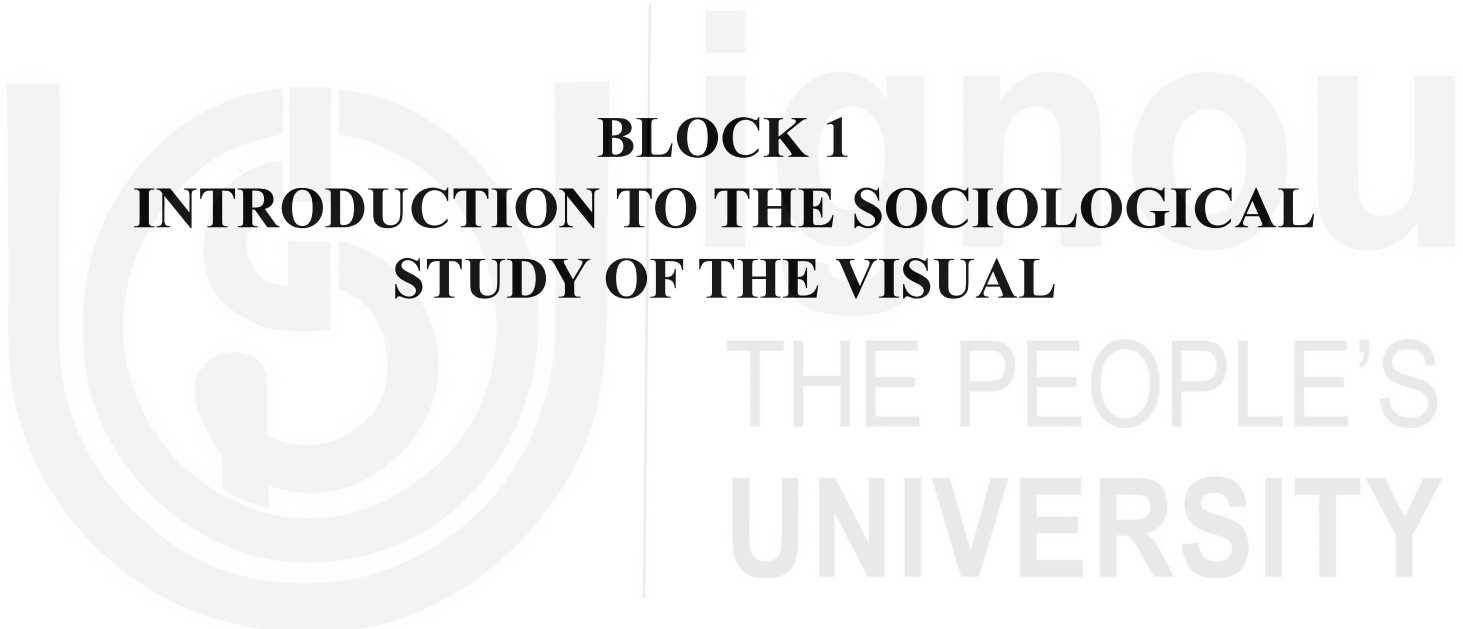
filmmaking ethics. We concluded this unit by mentioning the process of preserving ethnographic films and their valuable role in classroom teaching. In the following unit we discuss the subjective nature image making. The general belief that photographs represent the objective reality did not last for long as it was evident that what a photograph captures depends on the one capturing it. In other words, it is the photographer's choice of what to include and not include in a picture, the choice of angle, lighting techniques and so on. Mainstream sociology thus found it difficult to accept photography as a legitimate method of data collection owing to its subjective nature. In the next unit we focused attention on how photography can be used as tool for research. In this unit, we tried to understand the role of photography as a research tool. We first started off with the unit by understanding the phenomenon of observation as one must know how to see with visual accuracy while using a camera. We then went on to explicate the history of the development and use of camera in Social Science research. Next, we took a glance into the critical age of photography and how it became a carrier and shaper of modernism. Both photography and film during this period meticulously detailed the changing world

Block 3 Video and Film in Sociology of Society

In this block we deal with two units. Unit 6 discussed the way visual representations of society have changed with the change in technology. Visual representation began in the form of posed photographs and ethnographic films made of 'other' people. These were primarily made as a tool for education. With the advent of digital technology and smart phones, the manner of doing research has changed to a more collaborative one. Research is now done with the collaboration of the stakeholders. The dissemination of the research findings too is now not just through printed books and articles but also through websites, podcasts and blogs etc.

Block 4. Sociology, Multimedia and Hypermedia

Today more than ever, researchers are using forms of multimedia to collect and represent their data. Theoretical and empirical innovations have made visual methods, both acceptable and accessible. In fact, visual sociology makes evident to us the different kinds of technological changes that have taken place over the years. Therefore, qualitative researchers, including sociologists, have turned their focus to various kinds of visual methods. Easy availability of the means like the phone camera has made this visual turn easier. Although there are certain ethical issues associated with the usage of both multimedia and hypermedia, researchers can work their way around them.



BLOCK 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL
STUDY OF THE VISUAL

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 What is Ethnography?
 - 1.2.1 The Role of Technology
 - 1.2.2 What Makes a Visual Ethnographic?
- 1.3 Development of Films and Photography in Anthropology
 - 1.3.1 The Early Pioneers
 - 1.3.2 Texts vs Visuals
 - 1.3.3 Margaret Mead's Contribution
- 1.4 Shifts in Theory and Filming Methods
 - 1.4.1 Different Ways of Incorporating the Voice of the Informant
 - 1.4.2 The Factors Influencing the Shooting of a Film
- 1.5 Seeing Through the Lens of Identities
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 References
- 1.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand society through the visual
- Trace the development of films and photography in anthropology
- Discuss the visuals in the context of factors that impinge on identities.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The visual aspects of society are a universal and integral part of all cultures. In our contemporary society visuals are everywhere and are a part of our everyday lives. With technological advancement we have witnessed the newer forms of visual forms- photographs, films, video clips etc. With growth of social media platforms, we find these visuals forms have become increasingly interwoven with our daily lives and they have bearing on our cultures and identities. With visuals so permeating in all spheres of our social life they offer an important site of research especially ethnographic research. It is difficult to isolate ethnographic research from the visuals. In ethnography the images are inevitable as sounds, words or any medium of cultural expression (Pink 2001).

The ethnographic analysis of societies is concerned with the ways in which the ethnographer 'sees' and observes a society. The recording of data and the interpretations offered are an outcome of the process of 'visualising' what is

*Written by Dr. Reema Bhatia, Delhi University, New Delhi

seen. Visual anthropology is an outcome of this process of seeing. 'Seeing' has to be understood in the larger context of theoretical developments in anthropology. In the following sections we will discuss these issues in greater detail.

1.2 WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

Pink (Pink, Sarah. 2013) defines ethnography as a “methodology and an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals). It is based on the ethnographers’ experiences of realities that “are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced” (Pink, 2013: 18). All ethnographies are visual in some sense. The study of material culture, facial expressions, gestures or any aspect of spatial behaviour would constitute the visual.

The visual comprises of not just what we see but also what we do not see. There are some aspects of society that are so much a part of the everyday that we do not see them. For instance, the issues around gender inequality linked to domestic division of labour or limiting gender to just a gender binary or limiting sexuality to heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a belief and a framework of thinking that looks at man-woman sexual relationship as the normal and preferred mode of sexual orientation. It assumes a gender binary of only men and women excluding all other genders.

These issues were unseen in society till they were made visible to us through the feminist movements and the movements around sexuality.

Visuality is closely linked with issues of power in society. The normative is visible and the marginal is invisible. The researcher ‘sees’ the visible and the ‘invisible’ in the field including all aspects of culture like artefacts, everyday practices, rituals etc. Traditionally, ethnographic studies based on written texts helped us ‘see’ and visualise cultures. Occasionally the text would be accompanied by photographs and at times by films.

1.2.1 The Role of Technology

As technology developed and cameras became lighter and practices of filming and photographing gained ground. Initially cameras and camera reels were bulky and expensive and could not record sound. With technological advances cameras began to record both visuals and sound. Digital technology made cameras and recorders more accessible and affordable.

This contributed to the growth of visual anthropology as a subdiscipline of anthropology. Today when we speak of visual anthropology it is broadly understood in the context of photographs and ethnographic films.

1.2.2 What Kind of Visuals Can be Considered Ethnographic?

People have been taking personal photographs and making home videos for a long time. Are these images and films also ethnographic? Can documentaries also be considered ethnographic? Or do we just limit our understanding of ethnographic films and photographs to those created by an anthropologist?

According to Heider (2006) and Pink (2013) the term ‘ethnographic’ is not an absolute one and can be applied to any photograph or film. Personal photographs, home videos, documentaries and films and photographs shot by ethnographers or by others all can be used to understand societies and cultures. The same visual can be interpreted from various angles and perspectives. They may coincide, conflict or differ from each other. What matters is the interpretation of the visual and the context in which it is situated. In the following sections we will discuss the development and changes in the use of films and photographs in ethnographic studies by anthropologists.

Activity 1

Make a video of any daily activity like cooking, cleaning or getting ready and carefully analyse it from the point of view of the visible and invisible.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What is ethnography?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2) Visuality is closely linked with issues of power in society what is is visible and the is invisible.

3) The same visual can be interpreted from various and

4) What really matters is the of the visual and the in which it is situated.

5) How did changes in technology impact film making?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.3 DEVELOPMENT OF FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The use of photographs and films for ethnographic studies was not very popular with anthropologists. Anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski, who were amongst the first to do fieldwork, had photographs in their monographs but these were not analysed or commented upon. Ethnographic descriptions were limited to the use of words. Images were not considered to be important or were often neglected.



Malinowski Taking a photograph in the field

(Pic credit: John Tresch, “cropped-mALINOWSKI.gif,” *History of Anthropology Newsletter* 40 (2016): <https://histanthro.org>)

Only written ethnographies based on fieldwork and extensive notes were considered to be ‘real ethnography’. The films were “considered little more than visual field notes, illustrations that were interesting to look at but did little to advance ethnographic theory, an attitude that remained largely unchallenged until pioneers like Margaret Mead and Jean Rouch made a case for the importance of ethnographic cinema in the 1950s” (Griffiths, 2002, p. 168).

Interestingly, in 1922 Robert Flaherty, a mining engineer shot ‘Nanook of the North’, a film on the Inuit in the Hudson Bay (click on the link to see the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IAcRjBq93Y>) and ‘Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age’ (1926) on the Savaiim in Western Samoa. Moana was shot less than three hundred miles from the location where Margaret Mead, a well-known anthropologist was doing fieldwork amongst the Samoa. Nanook too was shot very close to the place where Franz Boaz, had done fieldwork. Both Mead and Boaz did not attach any importance to the films. This becomes significant particularly since Mead herself made ethnographic films and advocated the importance of the visual medium (as discussed in the succeeding sections) (Heider, 2006).

1.3.1 The Early Pioneers

Amongst the earliest to take photographs and shoot films were Alfred Cort Haddon, Walter Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen. Haddon was amongst the first to shoot a four minute footage of the Mer Islanders and Australian Aborigines in 1898 (see a short snippet of this film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoStmH3nS2o>). Walter Baldwin Spencer followed in 1901 and shot films on the Arrernte ceremonies in Central Australia. Frank Gillen too took photographs of the Australian Aborigines and had a keen interest in collecting ethnographic material. During the course of their work in Australia, Spencer and Gillen collaborated to photograph and film the Australian Aborigines. Together they made thirteen films on the Arrernte ceremonies. Photographs were only used to scientifically classify humans on an evolutionary scale and not for ethnographic studies. The novelty of films and expensiveness of the filming equipment led to the unpopularity of the visual methods in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. There was also the practical issue of tackling failure of equipment in remote places while doing fieldwork.

The equipment was bulky and difficult to manoeuvre. For instance in the filming of a dance the camera was unable to capture the entire range of movements if the dancers moved out the camera range. The people often refused to pose for photographs as they felt that this took away their privacy. Anthropologists thus often filmed and portrayed events that could be 'staged' like for example dance rituals.

1.3.2 Texts vs Visuals

Epistemological concerns too limited the use of the visual methods. The anthropologists felt that the visuals could not portray the socio cultural complexity of social life. Visuals were considered to be poor substitutes for complex structures, which were better explained through written texts. Films and visuals were considered to be undermining the authority of the anthropologists, since the viewers was free to interpret the image as they wished to (Griffiths, 2002).

Given the positivist theoretical orientation of anthropology, the voice of the 'scientist' i.e. the anthropologist was considered to be the voice of authority and knowledge. The anthropologists with a positivist orientation preferred photographs over films since they could be retouched and captioned and recaptioned. The photographs that were taken were assumed to convey an objective and a realistic portrayal of reality. Through captions anthropological meanings could be conveyed to the viewer and thus the authority of the anthropologist remained unchallenged.

It was thought that films would only work if they were accompanied with lectures by anthropologists. Even as late as 1952, films like 'Trance and Dance in Bali' (1952) by Margaret Mead had a very heavy narration. As MacDougall (1997) argues that the decline in the use of the visual methods in ethnography was an outcome of the shift in anthropological theory. The focus was now on the use of the genealogical method and oral records. Anthropologists preferred to use a notebook to record. The camera was no longer a part of fieldwork and in fact photographs were not used for illustrations even in ethnographic monographs by both British and American anthropologists and were limited to museums (Heider, 2006; Banks, 1997).

1.3.3 Margaret Mead's Contribution

After World War II, the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, amongst the Balinese marked a shift in this approach. Mead in the positivists anthropological tradition of Franz Boas and Herbert Spencer believed that the camera was objective. She argued that the role of the camera is like that of the telescope in astronomy. It was important for her to use the camera to record real events (Mead, 1975).

Mead's methodological approach to film making was one in which she argued that the relationship between the ethnologist, filmmaking team and the informants was important. This in some ways is a nod towards reflexivity and the incorporation of the informants point of view. Mead contended, that it was difficult to avoid making the film from the point of view of the filmmaker. She did however believe that the informants could be involved in the process of planning and editing the film. For her own work on the Bali she trained the Balinese to act as assistants and critics.



Margret Mead doing her fieldwork

(Pic credit:<https://deepartnature.blogspot.com/2011/06/margaret-mead-gregory-bateson-trance.html>)

The value of films for Mead was that it produced ‘masses of objective material’ that could be reanalysed in the light of changes in theory. She believed that films were better than words in recording cultural change and certain aspects of culture like dance and rituals. For Mead, the lack of photographic and filming skills should not be a deterrent. This could be compensated by using a skilled cameraman who could be directed by the ethnographer (Mead, 1975).

Mead and Bateson’s work on the Bali in 1942, although a watershed in visual anthropology, did not proceed beyond using photographs as a recording. Mead believed that the camera was like a ‘fly on the wall’ and that once it was set up to record automatically, it was unobtrusive and invisible (Mead, 1995). Though Mead, did underline the importance of involving the informants her work did not reflect the viewpoint of the informants and their own understanding of their culture (Banks, 1997).

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Name the two films made by Robert Flaherty.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) Name the two anthropologists who did their fieldwork close to where Flaherty shot his films.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3) Briefly outline the contribution of Haddon, Spencer and Gillen.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4) Why were texts preferred over visuals?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5) Why was there a decline in the use of the visual method?

.....
.....
.....
.....

1.4 SHIFTS IN THEORY AND FILMING METHODS

The use of the camera as a methodological tool has to be viewed in the context of theoretical developments in sociology and social anthropology. The shift in anthropological theory broadly from an evolutionary to positivist to a reflexive mode of analysis is also reflected in the shift in approach in the analysis of the visual. The role of the researcher as a neutral observer who does not influence the outcome of research has been questioned. The assumption that what we discover in the field cannot be known beforehand has dominated research. However, what we see is also an outcome of what we seek to discover.

As David MacDougall (1991) says “Whose story is it?” The issue is one of whose version should dominate. The shift in visual ethnography has been one in which there is a greater awareness in terms of incorporating the voice of the informants. This interplay between the voice of the filmmaker and the informant has influenced the development of visual ethnography. MacDougall (1991) and Pink (2013) raise the issue of whether merely incorporating the voice of the informant is enough to address issues of representations of the natives’ perspectives. There is no single way in which to address this methodological issue. Often the language of the ethnographer is inadequate to represent native categories of thought. To address this gap some films use indigenous narration as seen in Jean Rouch’s film *La Chasse au lion a l’arc / Hunting the Lion With Bow and Arrow* (1965) and *Dead Birds* by Robert Gardner in 1963.(See the link

for Rouch's film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PARjcJyZcKc> you might be interested in this short documentary on Jean Rouch as well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jzAegaqqf4>)

The question however remains whether this is the subjugation of the native's voice by the filmmaker or not.

1.4.1 Different Ways of Incorporating the Voice of the Informant

If a film is reflecting the encounter of the informant and the filmmaker then the subject's point of view becomes important. In an observational film the assumption is that the event being portrayed has to be depicted as it is.

Films that revolve around a single person would be made from the point of view of the person being filmed. The end product however is influenced by

- The presence of other people and the effect they exert over the process of filmmaking influences the final outcome.
- The people could be simply drawn to the process of filmmaking. They could volunteer or they could just be inquisitive and some may view themselves as important informers in the field. The filmmaker could either ignore or involve them. In either case they influence the final outcome of the film.
- Sometimes an important informant may be resistant to the idea of being filmed.
- Alternatively, a person's charisma could completely overshadow the film like for instance Bob Dylan in the film 'Don't Look Back' (1966) (MacDougall, 1991).

It is also important to recognise that the final outcome of the film is not just influenced by the filmmaker or the person. A film could go beyond all such boundaries, since it exists in a particular social and cultural context. The film takes on a life of its own and transcends all boundaries imposed by the filmmaker or the subject (MacDougall, 1991).

A film may not be of any importance to the subject like for example Spencer's film on the Aranda of Central Australia. The informant had little expectations from the film. Alternatively, a film could also be actively used by the informants. This can be seen for instance when people pose for the camera. The filmmaker is in several ways being directed by the subjects.

Sometimes the films could be a mere filming of rituals without understanding its significance for example under the direction of the subjects. MacDougall (1991) illustrates this point through the filming of Aboriginal rituals in Australia. The rituals could signify a special meaning that could not be disclosed to people who do not belong to that particular clan or group. The significance of the film varies according to who is viewing it.

- From an anthropological perspective it could be the voice of the anthropologist accompanying the natives.
- From another perspective it could be the voice of the native which is articulated by the anthropologist.

- It could also be the voice of the Aboriginal people speaking to each other through the film.
- It could be the voice of the aboriginal people speaking to the anthropologist.
- Or it could also be the voice addressing aboriginal and non- aboriginal people.

1.4.2 The Factors Influencing the Shooting of a Film

The shooting of a film can be planned before carrying out field work but often it is influenced by the social relationships and the activities of the ethnographer. Often visuals develop as a part of the relationships between the researcher and the informant. Pink (2013) gives contrasting examples from her own fieldwork in two different places. In her filming and photographing of the bull fights the informants posed for photos and actually requested for copies of the photographs. But in West Africa, photographs were a prestige item and one photograph was equal to ten loaves of bread. The photographs thus represented and signified an unequal relationship and status between the researcher and the researched. Thus there are no fixed ways in which the visual will be perceived and viewed. The professional and the cultural points of view are equally important.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What does the use of the phrase “Whose Story is it?” by David MacDougal mean?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) How has the gap between the language of the ethnographer and the natives been addressed in films?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- 3) What is the underlying assumption in an observational film?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

4) What are the different ways in which a film can be viewed?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

1.5 SEEING THROUGH THE LENS OF IDENTITIES

Reality is subjective and a single film could be interpreted in different ways. It is a part of the lived reality. Since reality is subjective it is not desirable to view it objectively. Elements like gender, race, ethnicity and class that impact the identities of the researcher and the researched influence the research process. It is important to understand how identity construction and perception can impact the process of filming. For example, in the 1990s gender became an important aspect of research. Consequently, gendered identity, negotiations and subjectivities became important in research. The way in which gender and sexuality is lived and experienced in a culture had an impact on visual ethnographies too.

The connection between visual images and experienced reality is constructed through individual subjectivities and interpretation of images. There needs to be a self-conscious reflexive awareness about the 'reality' that is portrayed by the camera. The visual representations are an outcome of the complex interaction between the culture to which the researcher belongs and his profession as an ethnographer or social scientist. Thus, visual representations become an outcome the personal and professional elements and the distinction between them is often blurred.

If one were to look at photographs of Olympics in the past or when they began, they would be a very rich source of ethnographic accounts of women in sports from the point of view of gendered identities, sexualities, race, ethnicity and also the intersection of various identities. As Bourdieu says (Pink, 2013) 'photographs and images produced by individuals inevitable reflect the shared norms of society. They reflect the shared schemes of thought, perception and appreciation of the whole group and not just those of the photographer. Individuals produce images that are a reflection of shared conventions and are a representation of a particular material and cultural context. It is difficult to say when a home film or personal photographs could become ethnographic accounts for example of gendered identities or sexualities.

Check Your Progress 4

1) What are the different elements of identity that can influence research?

.....
.....
.....
.....

- 2) The visual representations are an outcome of the complex interaction between the _____ to which the researcher belongs and his _____ as an ethnographer or social scientist.
- 3) Discuss how photographs and images reflect the norms of society?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

1.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have focussed on understanding the ways in which the use of visual methods in ethnographic research has developed. We have discussed this in the context of developments in ethnographic films and photographs. The approach to research based on visual methods has mirrored the paradigmatic development in theory. Research is also influenced by the identities of the researcher and the informants. While doing research it is important to keep in mind certain ethical considerations. First and foremost, we must ensure that we do not harm the people we study. Most of the issues around ethical research cover areas like informed consent, covert research, confidentiality, harm to the informants, protection of the informants and so on. Units 2 and 5 will the importance of ethics in research in greater detail.

1.7 REFERENCES

Griffiths, A. (2002). *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, & Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Heider, K. (2006). *Ethnographic Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Mead, M. (1975). *Visual Anthropology in a Discipline of Words*. In P. Hocking, *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (pp. 3-12). Paris: Mouton Publishers.

MacDougall, D. (1991). *Whose Story Is it?* *Visual Anthropological Review*, 7(2), 2-8.

MacDougall, D. (1997). *The Visual in Anthropology*. In Morphy, Howard and Marcus Banks, *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (pp. 276-295). London: Yale University Press.

Morphy, Howard and Marcus Banks. (1997). *Introduction: Rethinking Visual Anthropology*. In Howard Morphy and Marcus Banks., *Rethinking Visual Anthropology* (pp. 1-35). London: Yale University Press.

Pink, S. (2013). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Reserach*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Taylor, L. (1998, June). "Visual Anthropology is Dead, Long Live Visual Anthropology". *American Anthropologist*, 100(2), 534-537.

1.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals). It is based on the ethnographers' experiences of realities that "are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced"
- 2) Visuality is closely linked with issues of power in society what is normative is visible and the marginal is invisible.
- 3) The same visual can be interpreted from various angles and perspectives.
- 4) What really matters is the interpretation of the visual and the context in which it is situated.
- 5) As technology developed and cameras became lighter these practices of filming and photographing gained ground. Initially cameras and camera reels were bulky and expensive. They were difficult to carry and could not record sound. Further technological advances cameras began to record both visuals and sound. The onset of digital technology made cameras and recorders more accessible and affordable.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The two films were 'Nanook of the North' in 1922 and 'Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age' in 1926.
- 2) Moana was shot less than three hundred miles from the location where Margaret Mead, a well-known anthropologist was doing fieldwork amongst the Samoa. Flaherty's film Nanook too was shot very close to the place where Franz Boaz, had done fieldwork
- 3) Haddon was amongst the first to shoot a four minute footage of the Mer Islanders and Australian Aborigines in 1898. Walter Baldwin Spencer followed in 1901 and shot films on the Arrernte ceremonies in Central Australia. Frank Gillen too took photographs of the Australian Aborigines and had a keen interest in collecting ethnographic material. Later Spencer and Gillen collaborated to photograph and make films on the Australian Aborigines.
- 4) The heavy nature of the equipment meant that it was not easy to move around thus while filming the camera was unable to capture the entire range of movements. Sometimes people often refused to pose for photographs as they felt that this took away their privacy. Anthropologists thus often filmed and portrayed events that could be 'staged' like for example dance rituals.
- 5) The decline in the use of the visual methods in ethnography was an outcome of the shift in anthropological theory to the genealogical method and oral records. Anthropologists preferred to use a notebook to record and not cameras.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) According to David MacDougall the phrase “Whose story is it?” is about the issue of whose version should dominate, whether the filmmaker or the informant. The shift in visual ethnography has been one in which there is a greater awareness in terms of incorporating the voice of the informants. The interplay between the voice of the filmmaker and the informant has influenced the development of visual ethnography.
- 2) To address this gap some films use indigenous narration as seen in Rouch’s film *La Chasse au lion a l’ arc / Hunting the Lion With Bow and Arrow* (1965) and *Dead Birds* by Robert Gardner in 1963.
- 3) In an observational film the underlying assumption is that the event being portrayed has to be depicted as it is. An observational film would often be made without knowing the final outcome.
- 4) The significance of the film varies according to who is viewing it.
 - a) From an anthropological perspective it could be the voice of the anthropologist accompanying the natives.
 - b) From another perspective it could be the voice of the native which is articulated by the anthropologist.
 - c) It could also be the voice of the Aboriginal people speaking to each other through the film.
 - d) It could be the voice of the aboriginal people speaking to the anthropologist.
 - e) Or it could also be the voice addressing aboriginal and non- aboriginal people.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Elements like gender, race, ethnicity and class that impact the identities of the researcher and the researched influence the research process. It is important to understand how identity construction and perception can impact the process of filming.
- 2) The visual representations are an outcome of the complex interaction between the culture to which the researcher belongs and his profession as an ethnographer or social scientist.
- 3) According to Bourdieu photographs and images produced by individuals inevitably reflect the shared norms of society. They reflect the shared schemes of thought, perception and appreciation of the whole group and not just those of the photographer.

UNIT 2 MAKING SENSE OF VISUALS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Disciplinary Approaches to Visuals
 - 2.2.1 Visual Anthropology
 - 2.2.2 Visual Sociology
 - 2.2.3 History and Visuals
- 2.3 Visual Ethnography
- 2.4 The Act of Looking
 - 2.4.1 Reflexivity and Subjectivity
- 2.5 Visual Technologies, Image Making and Research
 - 2.5.1 Gendered Identities, Technologies and Images:
- 2.6 Visual Methods
 - 2.6.1 Appropriateness of the Visual Method
 - 2.6.2 Choosing the Technology
- 2.7 Ethics in Ethnographic Research and Visuals
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 References
- 2.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading the unit you should be able to:

- Explain how different social science disciplines have used of visuals in understanding society
- Explain visual research methods
- Explain what is visual ethnography
- Choose the appropriate visual method
- Discuss the significance of reflexivity and subjectivity in visual research

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In contemporary societies visuals are both abundant and universal. They are a part of our everyday lives and our cultures. Technological advancement has gotten us familiar with newer forms of visual forms such as photographs, films, video clips etc. Moreover, with the growth of social media platforms we find that these visual forms have become increasingly interwoven with our daily lives and social identities. One can gather a lot from what people choose to represent or showcase about themselves through visuals. There is both a conscious as well as unconscious rendering of social lives through visuals.

*Written Deepali Aprajita, Independent Scholar, New Delhi

With the increasing presence of visual forms and their permeation in all spheres of human social life, they become an important site of research too. For those seeking to study human societies, visuals serve as a good source of information and a means to record and archive data. The use of visuals to study society, aspects of culture are used in visual ethnography. This unit seeks to make the readers familiar with visual ethnography, the different theoretical and disciplinary approaches to the study of visual, to equip the readers with the ability to use visuals for research purposes and to also learn the use of different visual methods.

We start the unit with a brief overview of how various disciplines have used visuality to understand society. The researchers' background and their subjectivity have a huge bearing on visual ethnography. Researchers must be self-reflective to understand that the act of looking is never objective. Hence, a researcher should always maintain an awareness of how the different elements of their identity become important in their study. Ethnographers have to be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to the informants, how their identities are constructed and understood by people; We shall be discussing these aspects of reflexivity and some of the ethics one must keep in mind when embarking on using visual methods for research in the sections to follow.

2.2 DISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO VISUALS

Photographs, films or videos have been in use in different social science disciplines for some time. The terms of usage, their acceptance within different disciplines vary. The disciplines of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies have had differences in approaches to photographs and videos. But the history of some of the disciplines in India will showcase the importance of visuals. In fact, photography had played a key role in the emergence of anthropology in India. Colonial anthropologists would make use of photographs to document people, cultures and practices in India.

The use of visuals in ethnographic research however has been under much debate as well. Questions of rigour, objectivity, scientific method have been posed time and again to the use of visuals especially in ethnographic research. Despite this, anthropologists like Margaret Mead (1956) have made use of photographs in their studies.

'Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work, everyday lives, conversations and dreams. They are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, space and truth. Ethnographic research is likewise intertwined with visual images and metaphors. When ethnographers produce photographs or video, these visual texts, as well as the experience of producing and discussing them, become part of their ethnographic knowledge.' (Pink, 2001: 17).

In a globalised and liberalised world, one finds that photographs and videos are significantly used to portray different forms. The significance of visuals has increased much in the contemporary times with the emergence of social media and the increased usage of visuals in cultural representations. People share visuals of their everyday lives on different social media platforms- what they wear to what they eat, places they visit to the festivals they celebrate. As students of sociology and social anthropology the use of visuals becomes both important

and necessary in studying contemporary cultures. The world is more visually aware now. With the emergence of different online platforms such as YouTube, the growing popularity of different media streaming services the visuals lie at the centre of human societies. The use of visuals has occurred in the past as well. The following sections highlight this.

2.2.1 Visual Anthropology

Within the discipline of anthropology, Margaret Mead (1901-1978) has carried out some pioneering research using visuals. She is known for her study of Samoan adolescents and natives of New Guinea. Her work on the critique of naturalisation of differences between men and women through her study in New Guinea has influenced gender studies at large. She was amongst the first to use visuals in her fieldwork in Bali.

Mead writes the following on her use of photography: “Still photography was the first technical aid to be given full utilization, partly because of costs and problems of power and light in the field necessary for cine and sound, and partly because our methods of analysis were still so rudimentary that such complex sequences as those provided by tape recording and cine film were still relatively intractable to analysis. Furthermore, still photography can be reproduced in a familiar form - the book - and cross comparisons in spatial terms, in the single composite plate or slide, or by spreading hundreds of prints out on accessible flat surfaces are easy and practicable” (Mead, 1956: 79-80).

2.2.2 Visual Sociology

In 1974, American sociologist Howard Becker (1974) had written his seminal essay *‘Photography and Sociology’* where he talked about the similarity between Sociology and Photography. He wrote that both the fields emerged during the same time and both had similarities in describing aspects of society. While there were differences but the commonalities between the two were such that it would be possible for practitioners of both the disciplines to learn from each other. Documentary photographers could gain insights from sociological literature on the subjects they were photographing. Similarly, sociologists could learn from photographers. Photographs often made visible the unseen social realities Kirsten Hastrup (Hastrup, 1993) refers to this as the ‘blow up effect’. Often we tend ‘not to see’ the everyday since it is so much a part of our social landscape. Photographs may make visible that which is ‘invisible’ to us in the everyday.

According to American sociologist Douglas Harper (2012) visual sociology has a dual character. Firstly, it relies on photography and other visuals like films to study the social world. These formal visuals often document human lives and aspects of sociological enquiry such as identity, culture, work etc. Secondly, visual sociology overlaps with cultural and visual studies. Visual sociology in this sense focussed on understanding society through visuals like architecture, maps, advertisements and other ways in which people see and experience the world around them, This would for instance include the street view as seen by people or the way that buildings are designed or an analysis of illustrated novels. Both aspects of visual sociology are important for understanding society.

The use of visuals was significantly observed within the discipline of anthropology where social anthropologists used visual ethnography in their research. Among

the well-known visual anthropologists were Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Claude Levi-Strauss, John Marshall, etc. They used photography and filmmaking in their studies. Similarly, within the discipline of sociology there have been works such as that by French sociologist Bruno Latour who made use of the visual to study the city, Robert E. Park who studied American ghettos and religions in America using visual sociology (Harper, 2012).

2.2.3 History and Visuals

Geraldine Forbes (2003), a Canadian historian uses family photographs to understand women's role and position in society. She uses family photographs as documents to write about the history of Indian women. In her study she interviewed women who were present in old family photographs. She asked them about their recollection of the time or events during the time in which the photograph was taken. She also asks about the other family members or people present in the photograph or during the time to understand the social environment during the time. In the process of recollecting details about/surrounding the photograph women revealed details of their own life experiences which other remained undocumented.



Photo taken by Nag and Sons. C. 1930. This is the daughter of Soroma and BR Sen. Her mother died very young and she was greatly loved by her father as is evident from the way he showered her with toys without concern of gender appropriateness.

(Source: Roychowdhury, 2016)

‘Images helped explain historical events. For example, I was interested in the effectiveness of women who picketed cloth and liquor shops. One photo I have, of Lilavati Munshi picketing a foreign cloth shop in Bombay, illustrates why women were successful. In this photo, Lilavati is arguing with four white policemen and they are surrounded by a crowd of Indian men. Seeing one woman in a sea of men underscores the symbolic value of women emerging from “inside” to take part in public demonstrations.’ (Forbes, 2003: p 5)

‘The problem with writing women’s history has been that women have not been involved in the kind of activities as men. If women were involved in political activities, then it is easier to find written materials about them. However, it is very difficult to write about their lived experiences. In India especially, where the family is such an important unit of society, family photographs opened a new door to understanding the life experiences of women.’(Forbes as cited in Roychowdhury, 2016)

Works such as these highlight the significance of visuals when researchers are confronted with limited written sources of data.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The different disciplines that make use of visuals are _____, _____, _____.
- 2) Images gain different _____ when interpreted by different _____
- 3) Highlight the different ways in which different disciplines have made use of visual research.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.3 VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Ethnography can be understood as a methodology; as ‘an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles’ (Pink, 2001: 22). It is a process of representing and creating knowledge about societies, cultures, individuals. Ethnographers may use several methods like the participatory method and the observational method in their studies. According to social anthropologist Sarah Pink (2001) it is difficult to isolate ethnographic research from the visuals. In ethnography, the images are inevitable as sounds, words or any medium of cultural expression (Pink, 2001).

Two issues arise here, firstly, is it possible to observe and record reality. For example, something which is visible might not be necessarily true. Imagine a classroom that is set up for an inspection as opposed to the way that it is in the everyday world. Secondly, the observational approach implies that one can observe and extract objective information about the informants without any subjective influences.

We must understand that the final outcome is just one version of reality. It often offers the ethnographers version and experiences of reality. Reflexivity in research becomes important in which the ethnographers consciously reflect on their preconceptions and assumptions while doing research and its impact on the final outcome. A reflexive approach may also incorporate the voice of the people being researched.

The relationship between visuals, reality and the visible has been a subject of study within culture studies as well as anthropology. Visuals in the form of photographs, videos or other electronic media have gained much significance over the years as sites of cultural reproduction. Being integral to contemporary cultures and their practice they also become important in research. A study of a photograph, a video in the form of a film etc would allow us to look deeper into the different cultural meanings. There are different theories, schools of thought

that help us make sense of the visuals. For instance, culture studies, media studies, film and photographic theory and more.

The role of technology is also very important in this. There have been shifts due to technological innovations in the different forms of the visual media. For example, the use of photovoice in which the informants record their point of view using cameras.

The social can be understood through the visual in two ways. One is to capture culture in images, photographs, videos or films. The visual then becomes an archive, a repository of cultural meanings and practices. Second is to use visuals as sources of data. Existing visuals from a different time or place educate us about different cultures. They become sources of data which can be used as at later period in time or even a different place to understand society. The two can be elaborated with the following example: If one seeks to study urban planning during the colonial period one can study the history of urban planning through existing architectural photographs. One can also archive remains of colonial influence in urban planning by documenting present day buildings and other physical structures.

The use of photographs or films as empirical evidence raises one primary question before sociologists and social anthropologists – whether everything represented in the visual is true? According to Harper (2012), it is important to ask if the visuals completely represent all aspects of society the visible, the invisible and the partially visible and the complete reality. Even if the visuals cannot fulfil all the criteria can they still be used as empirical evidence? To answer this, he contends that all data whether visual or not is constructed.

2.4 THE ACT OF LOOKING

When one uses visuals for research purposes, the primary question that arises is - *How does one study visuals?* To begin with, it is important to identify the different forms of visuals which can be used in studying – photographs, films, videos, art. The act of studying visuals or making use of visuals, foremost, requires a reflexive approach in making use of visuals in studies. Whether one makes use of existing visuals or tries to capture social reality it is important that one is aware of his/her location and also of the informants. The questions of social position of the viewer – gender, age, caste, ethnicity, personal history and other factors are important here. As they impact the way in which an individual sees or observes a visual. Images gain different meanings when they are interpreted by different audiences. One could then say that seeing is socially constructed. What or how one sees is a complex social process.

Howard Becker (1974), had suggested that sociologists can make sense of visuals or analyse them by firstly concentrating on the ‘act of looking’. Instead of just giving a passing glance he suggests that one should give oneself sufficient time to look. He suggested to peer carefully and look beyond what is the most obvious in any image.

Traditionally, ethnography is considered as the study of cultures, social practices etc. Visual ethnography tries to understand a culture through visuals- the formal

visuals like photographs and also other aspects of society that are visible for instance through material artefacts, clothes, food, buildings, rituals etc. Culture is visible in different forms of human behaviour. It can be seen by observing and seeing how or with whom people do things.

One of the pioneering works on visual ethnography was by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson. Before their work *Balinese Culture* anthropologists had used photography to capture data that made studies of different races focusing on body measurements, physical attributes. Mead and Bateson's work was a shift from this. They used photographs to make new arguments about culture. Mead wrote the book on Balinese culture where she used photographs to carry her argument. In her book she described the villages in Bali, their layout, different aspects of social life – trance, mother child relationship, interactions between siblings, rites of passage and more. Bateson wrote,

“We recorded as fully as possible what happened while we were in the house yard, and it is so hard to predict behaviour that it was scarcely possible to select particular postures or gestures for photographic recording. In general, we found that any attempt to select for special details was fatal, and that the best results were obtained when photography was most rapid and almost random.” Many significant aspects of culture are captured through serendipity and unconsciously. (Mead and Bateson, 1942: 50)

Activity

Look at the image below notice all the details, write what you can gather from this image and compare your understanding of what is in the image with others in your study centre.



(Source: Paul Salopek | www.nationalgeographic.com)

2.4.1 Reflexivity and Subjectivity

Reflexivity is an important aspect of visual ethnography. This involves being aware of the following:

- Our presence as researchers

- Our subjectivity
- Our position in the context
- Impact of research on the participants

This implies being conscious in the ways we represent the other. Reflexivity within visual ethnography involves the following

- Being aware of the meanings that the visuals convey
- The meaning associated with the different visual media
- How the participants will interpret the visuals
- And finally, how will the visuals impact the participants

Both reflexivity and subjectivity are essential in carrying out visual ethnography. Researchers should always maintain an awareness of how the different elements of their identity become important in their study. Ethnographers have to be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to the informants, how their identities are constructed and understood by people.

The meanings conveyed through any visual are dependent upon how the visual is framed, what is captured in the visual, what is excluded, how does one make sense of that which is left out of the image and what does the visual convey about the person who created it. It also involves the distance between the observer and participant. How close or distant are we from the participants. These are crucial in defining the meanings that the visuals convey.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) One should be able to _____ reality, _____ reality and carefully capture _____ details.
- 2) _____ and _____ are essential in carrying out visual research.
- 3) Why is reflexivity important in conducting visual research?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

2.5 VISUAL TECHNOLOGIES, IMAGE MAKING AND RESEARCH

Pierre Bourdieu (1990) writing on photographic practices had tried to explain why people continue to use existing visual forms or styles in their visual work. He wrote that while individuals are free to capture anything and everything in photographs, there exist objective limitations to the practice of photography. Photographs cannot be used to capture all random human thought. The photographs are produced under certain shared norms of the society. They reflect the existing thoughts or perceptions of social groups.

Visual technologies serve as tools for creating visual records. They also help in the observational approach which is based on the assumption that reality is visible, observable and recordable in visuals. This approach however is characterised by two issues *one*, whether it is possible to observe and record reality, *two*, the observational approach means that one can observe and extract data about the informants. This approach then can be understood as one that does research *on* people.

The relationship between visuals, visibility and reality has been an important theme in culture studies as well as anthropology. Some scholar like Jenks (2002) believe that although material objects have a significant presence in culture, visual culture should not restrict itself to the material and observable (visible) aspects of culture. The visual is also a part of human imagination and conversations. The material objects that we encounter while carrying out visual ethnography should be understood from this perspective: material objects are visual, but visual images are not material. There is a rupture between visibility and reality which is important to the ethnographic approach to visuals because it means that reality cannot always be visual. Therefore, the complete reality cannot be captured in visuals but the visible aspects of reality can be studied. The combination of the two aspects of the visual -photographs or videos and reality as seen in the everyday lives helps us better understand societies and cultures.

2.5.1 Gendered Identities, Technologies and Images

The ethnographic method has become extremely important in studying gender in the recent years. Gender is no longer understood as a fixed and binary entity of masculine and feminine. There is now an emphasis on non-binary identities and on multiple femininities and masculinities. Gender or other elements of identities become important in the ethnographic study of visuals. When visual images or other forms of visual technologies are part of research, they play a role in determining how the researcher and the informant identities are constructed and interpreted. The gender relations as relations of power or the gendering of power relations have been analysed in visual ethnographic research.

For example, one might find that capturing photos of subjects might not always be welcome or acceptable and can lead to confrontations. Photography as an act is imbued with issues of power. The power hierarchies are also visible when one is trying to capture people belonging to different gender groups. One needs to keep in mind the ways in which different processes of image production, technologies involved, and aspects of identities such as ethnicity, race, gender etc. intersect.

Some scholars have emphasised on being cognizant of the 'gaze' when conducting visual ethnography. (The concept of gaze is drawn from Michel Foucault's writings). For example, the 'masculine gaze' or the 'colonial gaze' can lead to different forms of oppression depending on the context. Women can be objectified in visuals. Similarly, people of colour can be objectified by White ethnographers. In the Indian context, one can find people of varying ethnicities or castes being objectified (Pink, 2001).

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Social identities are _____ and _____ in visuals.
- 2) The observational approach is based on the assumption that reality is _____, _____ and _____

2.6 VISUAL METHODS

Ethnography makes use of different methods including the study of visuals. However, the visual method is not appropriate for all contexts. They should be used where they are appropriate. Visual research methods cannot be purely visual in nature. In other words, they cannot be used independently of other methods. The study of culture cannot be purely visual in nature, it is intertwined with the study of other aspects of society. Different ethical considerations, as discussed previously, also come in the picture while making use of the visual method.

2.6.1 Appropriateness of the Visual Method

The visual research methods can be divided into three broad categories:

- Making visual representations – This is the study of society through the production of images
- Examining pre-existing visual representations- This entails using existing visuals to create knowledge about society.
- Collaboration with social actors in the production of visual representations

All these methods can be planned before one sets out in the field. But often while in the field the pre-planned usage of the visual may need to be modified and adapted. There are unanticipated uses of the visual methods that researchers encounter in the field or in the course of the study. For example, someone who is making a study of folk religious practice might discover the importance of capturing certain ritualistic practices in the course of the fieldwork. A particular festival might be better explained through a film or photographs rather than through text.

Before venturing into the field for research it is important for the researcher to be informed on the pre-existing literature on the subject. It is also important to assess the appropriateness of the method of research being used. This includes analysing how the visuals or visual technologies would be perceived by the subjects. There might be instances when the informants are uncomfortable with visuals. Planning visual research requires acquiring good knowledge of the field beforehand. The researchers should have knowledge of how the visual method will develop within the context they are carrying out the study. This entails having prior knowledge of the cultures one is attempting to study. This is not purely a review of literature but a careful interactive interaction of the subjects through websites, emails etc.

2.6.2 Choosing the Technology

Apart from the fact that the produced visuals can be interpreted differently by people, the technologies can also be interpreted differently by people. The equipment used can create different meanings for people under study. For example, one needs to choose carefully which is best used in the setting – a traditional

camera or a digital camera or a phone camera. This is important because individuals constantly re-situate and construct self-identities depending on whom they are interacting with- people or even material objects. The presence of a camera can alter the ways in which people conduct themselves. This might lead to an imperfect capturing of reality. The capturing of visuals can be a more visible or eye-catching method for the informants as compared to the writing of a diary.

Check Your Progress 4

1) Employing a visual method in research involves having a prior knowledge of the _____. It requires having collaborations with _____ in the _____ of visuals

2) Why is the choice of technology important in visual research?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2.7 ETHICS IN ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND VISUALS

Ethical considerations are crucial to any study of human subjects. There are considerations on consent, confidentiality, safety of informants, ownership of data, etc. Most importantly in any ethnographic study the ethical conduct of the researcher is extremely important. While making use of the visual methods ethnographers should be aware of how the different approaches to the visual and the varying meanings can be given to the same image. Due to the arbitrary nature of photographic meanings, visuals are likely to be treated as evidence by non-academic viewers. Academics in the past have tried to come up with ways to carry out visual research with the least distortion of reality. Some have suggested the use of hidden cameras. But such a method raises serious ethical concerns. It is always the best practice to seek permission to photograph or video people. There are special permissions required to video public events. For example, Sarah Pink (2001) while studying bullfights in Spain sought special permission to photograph the event.

There are also concerns about the publication and ownership of visual research materials. Therefore, it is always advisable to clarify the rights of use and ownership of video or photographic images before their production. In some cases, it is advisable to use written agreements that state the use of videos or photographs or other materials, the purposes for which it will be used and the consent of participants.

We shall discuss various aspects of ethical considerations in our subsequent units as well, here we introduce you to some central concerns when using visual methods for research.

2.8 LET US SUM UP

There are different forms of visuals existing in society and with every increasing day we find the increased usage of visuals. In order to carry out research on aspects of human societies such as culture, visuals become an important tool. Visuals aid ethnographers within the disciplines of sociology, social anthropology, etc. However, the use of the visual method requires a deep understanding of aspects of visual research and being reflexive and having a good understanding of the field. Ethnographers are members of society too and the ways in which they make sense of visuals is influenced greatly by their personal experiences, theoretical beliefs, gendered identities and disciplinary agendas. Reflexivity is important in understanding the ways in which all these factors combine to produce visual meanings and create ethnographic knowledge. Creation of knowledge through visual research impacts deeply the people one studies and how they make sense of the methods and technologies in use. All of these aspects of visual research have to be kept in mind by visual ethnographer.

2.9 REFERENCES

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Forbes, G. (2003). 'Locating and Preserving Documents: The First Step in Writing Women's History', *Journal of Women's History* 14(4):169-178 DOI: 10.1353/jowh.2003.0006 (Accessed: November 18, 2020)

Harper, D. (2012). *Visual Sociology*. London: Routledge.

Hastrup, K. (1993). Anthropological Visions: Some Notes on the Visual and Textual Authority. In Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, *Film As Ethnography* (pp. 8-25).

Jenks, C. (2002). *Visual Culture*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Mead, M. (1956). Some Uses of Still Photography in Culture and Personality Studies. In D. H. (ed), *Personal Character and Cultural Milieu* (pp. 79-105). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Mead, M. and Bateson, G. (1942). *Balinese Character: A photographic analysis*. New York: New York Academy of Sciences.

Pink, S. (2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Roychowdhury, A. (2016). 'What do old family photographs tell us about the history of women?'. *The Indian Express*. Available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/art-and-culture/what-do-old-family-photographs-tell-us-about-the-history-of-women/> (Accessed: November 15, 2020)

2.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Visual sociology, visual anthropology, media studies
- 2) Meanings, People
- 3) Anthropology was the first discipline to make active use of visuals in carrying out research. The foremost use of visuals was done anthropologists like Margaret Mead who used photographs to capture aspects of Balinese cultures. Within sociology the focus has been on understanding the social through visuals like architecture, maps, advertisement. While in disciplines like history, visuals have been used to learn about the contexts and conditions when any visual was created.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Observing; recording; fully
- 2) Reflexivity; Subjectivity
- 3) Reflexivity involves being aware of our positions as researchers, our subjectivity and the impact of the research on the participants. In visual research it implies being aware of what meanings the visuals convey, how the participants interpret them and how they will impact the participants. While carrying out research one should be self-conscious about how they represent themselves to the participants. This allows one to fully capture information without leaving out important details.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Constructed; represented
- 2) Visible, observable, recordable

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) field; social actors; production
- 2) Visual technologies are the more visible forms of capturing data. As a result of this the ways in which subjects observe and create meaning can vary. While choosing technologies one has to be careful of the meanings that the equipment used in visual research create for the people. People are constantly creating and recreating self-identities depending on the people they are interacting with and even the objects that they are exposed to.