Session 4

Ethnographic Photography: Conventions & Methodologies
Conventions in Photography by Ethnographers

Research ABOUT the subject

Explanation—Erklärung

→ To use for scientific categorization and explanation
→ No image enhancement
→ To document
→ Show objects in actual, local, use
→ Intended for an audience outside of the field setting
“a good series of photographs showing each of the possessions of a primitive folk, and its use, would be far more instructive and far more interesting than any collection of the articles themselves.”
"corpses would be better"
"a photograph should capture not only the image of whoever or whatever was the focus of the photographer's attention, but also the visible context for that focus, and it should provide sufficient clues to the meaning of the object, person, or act which was the subject of the photograph"—Michael Young
Margaret Mead

Growth and Culture
Research WITH the subject
Understanding—Verstehen

→ Make the photograph part of the research setting itself
→ Allowing subjects to shape the photograph
→ Pictures used in interaction with informants, used within the local setting

“Photographs...themselves become commodities for exchange and the sites of negotiation, for example, among informants, between researchers and informants, between researchers and their families and friends ‘at home’ and among researchers....images associated with ethnographers will also be implicated in the way other people construct their identities and thus impact on their social relationships and experiences” (Sarah Pink 2001: 35-36)
Challenges and Benefits of Photography in Fieldwork

Theoretical purposes of the photos:
→ What are your research questions?
→ What will images do to address these questions?

Methodological considerations:
→ Rapport
→ Permission
→ Participant observation?
→ Camera-oriented behaviours? Are they “acting”?

Photo elicitation, lessening anxiety, creating opportunities for discussion:
1) “subjects”→ collaborators
   • memory aids
   • direct group discussions
   • conversation more than interview
   • “native point of view”
Benefits in Building Rapport:

1) shared with the people you photographed
2) a talking point with research subjects
3) can further, extend and deepen rapport