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Revealing Habitus, Illuminating Practice: Bourdieu, Photography and Visual Methods

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Abstract

Having taken taking as one of its starting points a concern to avoid fetishising method – or employing any form of method for its own sake – this paper then argues that visual methods of research may be particularly helpful in investigating areas that are difficult otherwise to verbalise or articulate. These include Bourdieu's understanding of habitus; our predisposed ways of being, acting and operating in the social environment that Bourdieu himself suggests are 'beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94). Having outlined what Bourdieu means by habitus and considered some of the difficulties surrounding its operationalisation, the paper goes on to consider Bourdieu's own use of photography and understanding of photographic practice. It is then argued that we can move beyond Bourdieu's position by employing visual methods specifically to uncover and illuminate aspects of habitus. Where research participants are directly involved in this process this also means that visual methods can be potentially transformative, allowing for the

development of forms of critical self-awareness amongst research participants of the sort that Bourdieu attributes to 'socioanalysis' (Bourdieu 1999: 611).

Introduction

The last decade has seen a developing and increasingly well established interest in visual methods of research amongst sociologists and researchers in related disciplines. In the UK alone, this has involved the publication of several textbook-type introductions (Banks 2001; Emmison & Smith 2000; Pink 2006; Rose 2006) and edited collections (Knowles & Sweetman 2004; Prosser 1998; Stanczak 2007), and the establishment in 2005 of a British Sociological Association Study Group specifically devoted to *Visual Sociology* (joining a series of longer established groupings relating to areas such as *Education*, *Family*, and *Religion*). The annual conference of the International Visual Sociology Association was held at the University of Southampton in 2004, and the Real Life Methods node of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods hosted a day long seminar on *Creating Visual Knowledge* at the University of Manchester in October 2007, while the three-year long ESRC Researcher Development Initiative *Building Capacity in Visual Methods*, based at the University of Leeds, is running a series of events throughout the UK up to November 2009, intended to develop expertise in visual methods across the social sciences as a whole. Worldwide, including

elsewhere in Europe and in the United States (where such developments are actually of somewhat longer standing), social scientists' increased interest in visual methods also continues apace.

This *renewed* interest in visual methods (see Chaplin 1994, on the relationship between sociology and photography from the mid-nineteenth to the early part of the twentieth century) can be linked to a number of other recent developments: the 'cultural turn' in sociology and related disciplines (Rojek & Turner 2000), a growing interest in and increased emphasis on visual culture more generally (Evans & Hall 1999; Mirzoeff 1999), the development of and increasing centrality of the internet, and the increased availability, cheapness and ubiquity of digital cameras and related technologies. It also coincides with a steady growth in interest in the work of Pierre Bourdieu, with the two areas coming together in Bourdieu's own work on photography and visual culture, and exhibitions of Bourdieu's Algerian fieldwork photographs at the Photographers' Gallery, Leicester Square, and Goldsmiths, University of London, in 2004 and 2007 respectively (and with the latter – alongside its accompanying seminar series – forming the basis and occasion for this collection of papers as a whole).

These two areas (visual methods and the work of Pierre Bourdieu) are also central to my own interests, with the partial overlap and links between the two also contributing to the initial basis for this particular piece of work. As the co-editor of one of the collections referred to above, a co-convenor and founding

committee member of the BSA study group, and a presenter at the Manchester seminar and one of the recent *Building Capacity* events, I might also be regarded as a proponent of visual methods and in this sense as contributing to the renewed interest in visually oriented forms of research. That said, this paper is also motivated by a developing concern over the potential fetishisation of method, or, in other words the potential amongst visual sociologists - as with other groups identified with a particular way of working rather than a particular set of thematic concerns - to prioritise their preferred *way of looking* over and above what is being *looked at*, or (in still other words) to put the methodological cart before the substantive horse where their sociological work is concerned. That is not to say that this is a necessary consequence of the developments outlined above or that it should be regarded as a particular difficulty where visual methods are concerned, but it is of concern given the increased interest in visual methods, the cheapness and ubiquity of relevant technologies, and, as indicated, the way in which a preferred way of looking can easily begin to take precedence over the issue or area examined.

In taking as one of its starting points a concern to avoid the adoption of particular methods for their own sake, however, the paper is also intended to suggest that visual methods may be particularly well suited to investigating particular areas of sociological concern, not least those aspects of our everyday lives which, through familiarity or otherwise, may be difficult otherwise to recognize, let alone to put into words (Inglis 2005: 2-3; Dant 2004: 58). More specifically, the paper is

intended to suggest that visual methods can play a particularly helpful part in the investigation or uncovering of habitus, the deeply embedded sets of largely unconscious dispositions that Bourdieu tells us 'cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94; see also Bourdieu 1984: 466; 1990a: 73; 2004a: 584). Where respondents themselves are fully involved in this process, the paper also suggests that visual methods can play a part in revealing to them otherwise unrecognised aspects of their everyday lives and in so doing effect the sort of potentially revelatory self-transformation that Bourdieu suggests can be achieved through 'socioanalysis' (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1999: 611; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 210-11; Wacquant 1992: 49).

Habitus

As I have discussed more fully elsewhere (Sweetman 2003), habitus refers to our overall orientation to or way of being in the world; our predisposed ways of thinking, acting and moving in and through the social environment that encompasses posture, demeanour, outlook, expectations and tastes. Informing both the smallest and largest of actions and gestures, habitus also encompasses bodily hexis; the way we walk, talk, sit and blow our nose (Bourdieu 1984: 466; see also Bourdieu 1977: 93-4; 1990a; 69). Although it may appear natural, habitus is a product of our upbringing, and more particularly of our class. It is class-culture *embodied*; an adaptation to objective circumstances that makes a

'virtue of necessity' through encouraging our tastes, wants and desires to be broadly matched to what we will be realistically able to achieve (Bourdieu 1984: 175).

In this sense, habitus at least partially reproduces social structure; as the embodiment of social arrangements and material circumstance it ensures – for the most part - that we fulfill our destiny as members of a particular class. That said, habitus is also intended to dissolve the structure/agency dichotomy: as the *embodiment* of social structure, habitus *allows* us to act, to participate effectively in the various social fields in which we play a part. As a system of 'durable', but 'transposable' dispositions (Bourdieu 1977: 72), and the 'generative principle of regulated improvisations' (Bourdieu 1990a: 57; see also Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 126-7), habitus grants us a certain freedom of movement, albeit subject to particular limitations and constraints.

Habitus operates – or 'realizes itself' (Bourdieu 1990b: 116) – in relation to field, each field representing a relatively distinct social space – occupational, institutional, cultural – in which more or less specific norms, values, rules, and interests apply. Different habitus are suited to more or less distinct positions within particular fields, with individuals most able to operate effectively (and 'be themselves'), where there is a clear affinity between their dispositional conduct and their position within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127). Different forms of habitus have different values in different fields, and individuals have

strong attachments to – or interests in – particular positions within particular fields. Place someone in a different position within the field, or in a different field altogether, and they will behave differently – and will be more or less comfortable or ill at ease – depending upon their 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990b: 61) with which they are now confronted.

Habitus, for me, is a very helpful concept – a way, apart from anything else – of insisting on a resolutely *sociological* view of action.[1] Not only is the concept a little vague or lacking in clarity, however, but it is also explicitly formulated as predominantly or wholly pre-reflexive - a form of *second-nature*, that is both durable and largely unconscious, and which is disproportionately weighted towards the past (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 133). As Bourdieu himself points out: 'The principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94; see also Bourdieu 1984: 466; 1990a: 73; 2004a: 584)

There are difficulties with this statement – and as I've discussed elsewhere (Sweetman 2003), and will return to in a moment, it may be that some forms of contemporary habitus are more 'reflexive' than others – what it does point to, however, is the difficulty of both operationalising and investigating the concept, for which visual methods may be of particular use. In the remainder of the paper, then, I will first talk a little more about the difficulties of operationalising habitus

and about Bourdieu's own use of photographs, before suggesting that, as prompts and personal mnemonics, and as powerful ways of conveying information in an accessible, economical and *non-verbal* way – visual material and visual methods may be particularly helpful in revealing and illuminating aspects of the mundane, the taken-for-granted and that which 'cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94).

Operationalising habitus

As has already been indicated, it may be that there are times when habitus is more immediately accessible, more easily reflected upon, and more easily verbalised: easier to make at least partially explicit.

First, as Bourdieu himself makes clear, situations where there is a lack of fit between habitus and field can bring habitus to the fore, causing one to feel like a fish out of water and rendering conscious what was previously taken for granted. In such situations one becomes aware of oneself – *self-conscious* - precisely because one is unsure what to do and how to behave, and no longer has a clear 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990b: 11, 108; see also Bourdieu *et al* 1999: 511).[2] According to Bourdieu, self-consciousness of this sort is also a fairly general experience for particular groups such as the petit-bourgeoisie (1984: 207).

Second, it may also be the case that such situations are now becoming increasingly ubiquitous, to the extent that, however paradoxically, it now makes sense to refer to the development of a reflexive *habitus*, the consequence of a host of social, cultural and economic shifts, which demand flexibility – as a structural requirement – whilst ensuring that crises – understood as situations where one is unable simply to go on as before – become all but ubiquitous – a 'normal' feature of our everyday lives (Sweetman 2003).[3]

Third, and regardless of developments such as increasing demands for flexibility and the apparent ubiquity of crises in our everyday lives, it should also be noted that for writers such as Nick Crossley (2001a, 2001b) and Nicos Mouzelis (2007), habitus necessarily involves greater degrees of reflexivity than Bourdieu's understanding of the concept seems to imply, while for Matthew Adams (2006), even apparently unreflexive forms of action ought sometimes to be more appropriately interpreted as reflecting lack of opportunity rather than simply the unproblematic operation of habitus.

Fourth, and as I will come back to when talking about the potentially beneficial effects of visual methods, a more positive form of self awareness can also be achieved through forms of sociological training or enquiry (Bourdieu 1990b: 15), or what Bourdieu sometimes refers to as socioanalysis (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1999: 611; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 210-11; Wacquant 1992: 49). Despite its durability, the habitus 'may be *changed by history*, that is by new experiences,

education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made at least partially conscious and explicit)' (Bourdieu 2002: 29, original emphasis), and although 'It is difficult to control the first inclination of the habitus, … reflexive analysis, which teaches us that we endow the situation with part of the potency it has over us, allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it' (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 136). In places, Bourdieu also suggests that understanding of this sort may emerge through the obligatory 'self-analysis' precipitated by certain forms of crisis.[4]

In such instances though, reflexive self-awareness emerges as a consequence of the research or 'educative' process rather than being something that is immediately accessible as a matter of course. As this last point also reiterates then, for the most part Bourdieu himself is clear that habitus is to be regarded as largely unconscious, or rather as a form of *practical* consciousness that operates without explicit recognition or deliberation in order to allow us keep on playing the game, and 'whose achieved product one discovers, at the end, *almost like a spectator*' (Bourdieu 2002: 33, my emphasis). So long as there is a reasonable fit between habitus and field we can operate largely un-self-consciously, without literally or metaphorically stumbling or tripping over our own shoelaces as we might if we became consciously aware of what we were doing or – more to the point – how we were doing it.[5] Indeed, it should also be noted that, even where we might reasonably talk about a reflexive habitus, such a form of habitus would itself operate in a taken-for-granted way, or as a matter-of-course: a deeply

embedded disposition towards reflexivity does not necessarily imply a tendency to recognise or reflect upon this disposition.[6]

Whilst important to Bourdieu's conceptual framework in emphasising the deeply embedded nature of the dispositions embodied in this way, and the way in which such dispositions thus become naturalised - a form of 'second nature' that is not even recognised, let alone questioned, and through which certain practices are automatically excluded 'as unthinkable' (Bourdieu 1990a: 54; see also Bourdieu 1977: 77) – it is also immediately clear, I hope, how this particular feature of habitus might also render it less amenable to straightforward sociological enquiry than other aspects of our everyday lives. This is in part because of sociologists' own possession of a 'scholastic habitus', which, as indicated above, does not easily see beyond its own way of understanding and organising the world (Bourdieu 2002: 33),[7] but it is also a consequence of the more general difficulty of investigating that which is generally unstated and unthought: how, for example, might we ask people to reflect on aspects of their lives that they themselves are unaware of, that are 'beyond the grasp of consciousness', and 'cannot even' - or perhaps one should say cannot *easily* - 'be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94). As David Inglis points out in his recent book on *Culture and Everyday Life*:

> When someone is called to reflect upon and describe their everyday
> existences, not only is the point of doing that probably somewhat obscure

… but it is also rather difficult to put into words what one takes for granted every single day of one's life. Asking people to reflect upon activities they rarely, if ever, reflect upon can render them unsure as to what to say and how to put into words things that they generally never vocalize. (Inglis 2005: 2-3)

And as Tim Dant points out in relation to more specific aspects of everyday practice:

The very familiarity of our own material action (opening doors, making cups of tea) makes it very difficult to recognize the complexity that is specific to particular contexts beyond remarking on skill, which is taken to be a personal characteristic rather than a socially produced feature of habitus. (Dant 2004: 58)

Extensive and detailed ethnography may be one answer to this difficulty, of course, but as Bourdieu points out, in relation to his own fieldwork in Algeria, it was only through a 'long series of often *infinitesimal* experiences' that he was able 'to feel … in sensible and concrete fashion the contingent and arbitrary character of [the] ordinary behaviours that we perform every day in the … course of our economic practices and that we experience as the most natural things in the world' (Bourdieu 2000: 23, my emphasis), and thereby to understand the

extent of the shift required amongst his Algerian subjects in the course of their 'Entry into the urban world' (Bourdieu 2000: 27).

More recently, in *The Weight of the World*, aspects of their interviewees' habitus are clearly revealed in the extended interviews conducted by Bourdieu and his co-researchers, as when one of Bourdieu's farmers tells him 'If we were able to make a go of it, our generation, it's because we didn't watch the clock' (Henri F., in Bourdieu *et al* 1999: 385), and 'in 29 years we didn't leave the place for more than two days in a row' (Henri F., in Bourdieu *et al* 1999: 388). These observations tend to be couched at a fairly high level of generality, however, and necessarily reveal aspects of habitus of which the interviewees are consciously aware (or are made aware in the course of the interview), and in many cases regard as problematic, without necessarily capturing the specificities of particular and potentially mundane everyday activities. In addition, as Bourdieu makes clear, the interviews in question relied upon a careful matching of respondents and interviewers (1999: 609), such that the researchers' questions were 'objectively attuned to those of the respondent' (1999: 611) and proceeded via a form of '*active and methodical listening*' (1999: 609, original emphasis), itself reliant upon both extensive prior research (1999: 613) and the development amongst researchers of a particular form of sociological habitus, through which they were able to 'help respondents deliver up their truth or, rather, … be delivered of it' (1999: 621), and in so doing to touch upon things of which they were simultaneously 'unaware' but also knew 'better than anyone' (1999: 621).

In his most famous work - *Distinction* (1984) - with its detailed analysis of

patterns of consumption, Bourdieu arguably illustrates - or deduces - the *effects*

of habitus rather than focusing directly on its operation, demonstrating the

workings of the habitus through the uncovering of patterns and relationships

which together constitute lifestyles and which owe their 'stylistic affinity … to the

fact that they are the products of transfers of the same schemes of action from

one field to another' (Bourdieu 1984: 173). He does not explore in detail *why*

certain choices are made and others are not, but instead uncovers patterns and

regularities and then explains such patterns in relation to specific generative

principles and the taste for necessity which makes a virtue of that which people

are realistically able to achieve (Bourdieu 1984: 175). To the extent that further

explanation is offered this frequently takes the form of homilies and (sometimes

unsubstantiated) observations of a rather Goffmanesque sort, not a systematic

and detailed investigation of *how* and *why* such choices were actually made.

Even if they have not focused specifically on the 'unconscious embeddedness' of

habitus as a particular difficulty, the more general difficulties of employing

habitus as a concept have been noted by numerous commentators, several of

whom have pointed to it's apparent vagueness and indeterminacy (Reay 2004:

438; Shilling, 1993: 149; Wainwright, Williams & Turner 2006: 550). That is not to

say that this has always been seen as a weakness. Regarding habitus as a

'conceptual tool to be used in empirical research' (2004:439) and a helpful way of

activating the sociological imagination,[8] Diane Reay also suggests that 'There is an indeterminacy about the concept that fits in well with the complex messiness of the real world' (2004: 438), and that, 'paradoxically the conceptual looseness of habitus also constitutes a potential strength. It makes possible adaptation rather than the more constricting straightforward adoption of the concept within empirical work' (2004: 441).

Steven Wainwright, Clare Williams and Bryan Turner (2006) also argue that one of the supposed weaknesses of Bourdieu's concepts – their apparently 'chameleon-like quality' (Prior, in Wainwright, Williams & Turner 2006: 550) – is actually one of their strengths: referring to the 'open and adaptable nature of his key concepts' (2006: 553), the authors also argue that 'It is the very vagueness and ambiguity of Bourdieu's notions that give them an elasticity that allows the concepts of habitus, capital and field to be employed in a wide range of empirical research projects' (2006: 550). It should also be noted, however, that their helpful and illuminating discussion of varieties of balletic habitus also concentrates specifically - as is explicitly acknowledged in the text - on dancers possessing a particular sort of 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman, in Wainwright, Williams & Turner 2006: 552), and which the authors accessed primarily through interviews and memoirs, or – in other words – through focusing on aspects of habitus that could readily or already had been verbalised. Many of the dancers that Wainwright, Williams and Turner refer to had also moved between companies – or 'fields within fields' (Crossley, in Wainwright, Williams & Turner 2006: 543) – thereby

making them even more aware of – and able to easily discuss – the nature of their experiences and the distinctions and idiosyncrasies of their own particular styles.

As well as making it difficult to uncover or investigate, the largely unconscious nature of habitus as a set of deeply embedded and unthought-out dispositions has also arguably contributed to the more general charge of indeterminacy that Reay (2004) and Wainwright, Williams and Turner (2006) suggest is a strength, as well as to the rather cavalier way in which the concept has sometimes been employed and the variety of often rather casual ways in which it has been operationalised (Reay 2004). Indeed, it is frequently the case that the concept is employed without being defined or operationalised at all – at least explicitly – to the extent that Reay (2004) suggests that 'the concept is assumed or appropriated rather than 'put into practice' in [many] research accounts, and it appears that it is 'the gravitas of habitus' that is desired rather than its operationalization' (2004: 440). Either way, there are numerous examples of recent work where the concept is utilised without being operationalised, and the fit between research data and conceptual tool is therefore assumed. The following now looks at Bourdieu's own use of and discussion of photography before going on to consider how visual methods may be employed in revealing or uncovering aspects of habitus and in so doing also potentially assist in the sort of enhanced understanding of oneself and one's position in the world that develops

though what Bourdieu refers to as socioanalysis (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1999: 611; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 210-11; Wacquant 1992: 49).

Bourdieu and photography

As well as making use of more standard fieldnotes (figure 1), and other recording techniques (Bourdieu 2004b: 423) Bourdieu himself took a large number of photographs during his early fieldwork in Algeria, partly as a way of indicating concern and establishing and affirming contacts (Wacquant 2004: 400) but also in an attempt to step back from the emotional intensity of his observations and 'cushion the shock of a crushing reality' (Bourdieu, in Wacquant 2004: 402; see also Schultheis 2007: 23-24).

Figure 1: Bourdieu's fieldnotes (© Camera Austria; Source: Bourdieu 2003: 98)

Some of these were illustrative of more traditional practices (figure 2), while others, acting like fieldnotes, were, in Bourdieu's words, also a way of 'intensifying [his] way of looking at Algeria': 'I would photograph a marriage lamp, for example, in order to study it afterwards and find out how it was made, or I would photograph a pestle and mortar with the same idea in mind' (in Tresilian 2003): 'Photographs taken during an enquiry that one re-examines at leisure, like recordings, can allow one to find details unnoticed at first glance, that one could not have had the opportunity to look at in detail during an interview' (in Tresilian

2003; see also Schultheis 2007: 23, 28). As Loïc Wacquant points out, this use of photography as a 'recording and storage technique' was particularly significant in the highly-charged context in which much of Bourdieu's fieldwork took place, which meant that 'it was simply not possible to linger about and carry out minute observation' (Wacquant 2004: 400).

Figure 2: Men with animal carcasses (© Camera Austria; Source: Bourdieu 2003: 43)

As his fieldwork progressed, however, Bourdieu also went on to photograph 'situations that spoke to [him] because they expressed dissonance' (in Tresilian 2003), or – as I would interpret this statement – an apparent disjunction between habitus and field, or (perhaps less theoretically) habitus and place (figures 3 & 4; see also Wacquant 2004: 400).[9] Bourdieu himself regarded the image in figure 4 as 'Among [his] most 'typical' photographs' in this respect, although he also felt that it was a little too easy, too obvious, 'too concerned to make a pre-arranged point' (in Tresilian 2003; see also Schultheis 2007: 27).

Figure 3: Man in traditional dress (© Camera Austria; Source: Bourdieu 2003: 43)

Figure 4: Woman on moped (© Camera Austria; Source: Bourdieu 2003: 43)

Elsewhere, in *Distinction* (1984) and *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* (1990), Bourdieu also argues that both tastes in and practices of photography are *expressive* of habitus, with working-class individuals displaying a no-nonsense, anti-Kantian aesthetic which resonates – or is homologous - with other aspects of their lifestyles (see also Bourdieu 2004c). What I would like to suggest in the remainder of this paper, however, is that through careful use of photography, and practices such as collage, collaboration and elicitation, we can move beyond Bourdieu's own use of photographs, to uncover, reveal and convey deeper aspects of habitus, or what is sometimes regarded as the mundane and taken-for-granted. This is precisely because of the way images can act as prompts and personal mnemonics as well as as powerful ways of capturing and conveying information in an accessible, economical and *non-verbal* way.

Revealing habitus, illuminating practice

The use of photography to convey key aspects of a group's overall orientation to the world is well illustrated, for example, in Douglas Harper's recent combined essay and photo-essay, 'Wednesday Night Bowling' (2004), in which the careful placement of photographs of different aspects of his subjects' lives and lifestyles, in what at times approximates to a form of collage, provides us, as 'readers', with a far deeper sense of their 'way of being in the world' than could be easily expressed simply in words. This is also true of John Berger and Jean Mohr's earlier work, *Another Way of Telling*, in which aspects of peasant life are

powerfully articulated as 'lived experience' (Berger & Mohr 1995; 134) in the form

of an extended sequence of photographs which tell the story of their fictional

protagonist's 'reflections' on life (Berger & Mohr 1995; 133), in part through the

inclusion of 'moments and scenes which she could never [actually] have

witnessed' (Berger & Mohr 1995; 134). Taken together, the photographs tell us

not simply about her own but about the peasant habitus as a whole, the coarse

but essential humour, 'down-to-earth-ness' and necessary vulgarity of which is

captured in images of a stuffed-fox wearing glasses and a table held up by real

donkey's legs, but which combine with images of animal intestines, lined faces

and neatly-stacked logs to speak eloquently of a particular relationship with the

world.

Where Harper and Berger and Mohr capture and convey aspects of their

subjects' overall orientations to the world, however, visual methods can also be

used to reveal more specific aspects of habitus, as illustrated by Magda Segal's

book of photographs, *Southampton's Women* (2004), produced in association

with the Southampton Women's Survey undertaken by the Environmental

Epidemiology Unit at the University of Southampton during the late-1990s.

Through the juxtaposition of photographic collages of her subjects in a variety of

situations with more minute, arguably more intimate shots such as the interiors of

their fridges (figure 5), Segal arguably goes further than Harper and Berger and

Mohr in allowing us to glimpse below the surface of quite particular (and in this

case health-related) aspects of these women's everyday lives.

Figure 5: Interior of Fridge (© Magda Segal; Source: Segal 2000)

This is also true of recent work by both John Hockey and Jacquelyn Collinson (2006) and Tim Dant (2004), who employ visual methods to uncover and illuminate aspects of leisure and occupational habitus respectively. In their article 'Seeing the Way', for example, Hockey and Collinson successfully combine 'visual and autoethnographic data' (2006: 70) in order to 'convey to the reader not only some of the specific subcultural knowledge and specific *ways of seeing*' employed by distance runners, 'but also some of the runner's embodied feelings and experience of momentum en route' (2006: 70, my emphasis). Whilst noting that their 'narrative can impart something of this knowledge', they point out that 'the combination of narrative and photographs provides a more effective way of communicating to the reader how distance runners *see* their training terrain' (Hockey & Collinson 2006: 73, my emphasis).

Dant, meanwhile, reports on 'a video based research project' (2004: 42) on garage technicians, noting that their way of working, whilst accessible through video data, would have been difficult to verbalise - or to 'write down in a manual or set of instructions' (2004: 48) - because it is based upon a form of often tacit and ''embodied knowledge' … contained within the relatively unconscious, ordinary 'ways of doing things' that constitute the shared habitus' (2004: 43). As

he points out in relation to a specific job involving the supposedly straightforward but actually surprisingly complicated task of replacing a wiper-assembly:

> the way these technicians worked was a mixture of trial and error, embodied skill and experience and collaboration … What they did not do was work in a rigid or systematic way, for example by following fitting instructions or strictly learnt or established procedures. (Dant 2004: 55)

Video data is helpful in this context because it allows for the capture of aspects of occupational habitus that cannot easily be put into words, and also because it allows for repeat viewing, and the capturing of details that might otherwise pass unnoticed (Dant 2004: 56-7). Commenting on the relationship between video and still images, Dant points out that with the latter 'the crucial flow of action is lost' (2004: 58), but that this can be partially conveyed though 'a series of still 'frames' in sequence' (2004: 58).

The uncovering and illumination of the everyday and taken-for-granted can also involve respondents more directly in the in the taking of photographs. This was the case in Sue Heath and Elizabeth Cleaver's (2004) study of shared households, where the decision to provide participants with disposable cameras provided them with shots which again revealed simultaneously intimate, banal and potentially unremarked aspects of shared living. These included details which had been noticed but misinterpreted during visits to the households, such

as a cupboard containing multiple boxes of breakfast cereal, the significance of which had been taken to indicate highly individualised living patterns in a shared space, but which was subsequently explained as its opposite, and as reflecting one member of the household's fondness for '3 for 2' offers, the spoils of which were then shared by his co-habitees (Heath & Cleaver 2004: 76).

More significantly, however, and as has already been indicated above, involving research participants directly in the process of collecting, arranging and analysing visual material may also contribute to their own understanding of aspects of everyday practice which would not otherwise easily be uncovered, articulated or understood. This is well illustrated by Adrian Chappell's account of a practical photography project undertaken by 'an eighteen-year-old working-class girl' called Tina (1984: 112), in collaboration with Chappell as a then tutor in the Inner London Education Authority's Cockpit Cultural Studies Department during the early 1980s, and which was 'intended to help Tina explore the relationships within her family' (1984: 112). As Chappell points out, albeit with no direct reference to the work of Bourdieu, 'the underlying objective' in the Department's 'project work with young people' was exactly of the sort that Bourdieu attributes to socioanalysis: 'to help transform the 'taken-for-granted' into a reflexive, self-critical practice' (1984: 114), and participating in the project enabled Tina to encounter uncomfortable 'truths' about her family, relationships and everyday life, or – as she herself put it - to 'see what I don't want to see' (Tina, in Chappell 1984: 114).

Figure 6: The Mitre (© Adrian Chappell; Source: Chappell 1984: 121)

Figure 7: Laundry (© Adrian Chappell; Source: Chappell 1984: 123)

Having initially taken a large number of pictures in different contexts, the subsequent process of arranging her photographs into display-panels allowed Tina first to 'cross-reference and detail the relationships within' her and her boyfriend's families (Chappell 1984: 116), before moving on to not simply represent but better understand these relationships. Tina's photographs of two distinct social spaces – the pub and the launderette (figures 6 & 7) - for example – 'began to demonstrate clear differences in how each of the … spaces was used, and how each was perceived' (Chappell 1984: 120), and her subsequent exploration of the domestic lives of two of the women who worked in the launderette – her boyfriends' mother and aunt – then allowed her to develop:

> powerful insights into how her relationship with [her boyfriend] was being shaped by family pressures. In particular she was to notice the extent to which male-dominated assumptions shaped her boyfriend's attitudes and at the same time determined how she herself was expected to respond.
> (Chappell 1984: 124)

A similar sort of process is described by Margit Böck (2004), who tells us how both new and already existing photographs in family albums:

> can tell us – in a way that differs from a story, interview or a spoken account, in some ways more immediate and yet in part more cryptically – about the family's way of 'being-in-the-world', about the family members, about how those who took the photos saw themselves, saw the 'other' and others, and suggest what relation they establish between themselves and that which is 'other'. They show us what is significant for them in their everyday life … in ways that a spoken account or story or interview might never reveal. (Böck 2004: 281)

In the article from which this quotation is taken, Böck is particularly concerned to investigate what she refers to as her photographers' 'information habitus', or their predisposed ways of understanding, relating to and making use of information of various sorts, and suggests, in common with Chappell, that recognition of one's habitus can subsequently allow for an *expansion* of research subjects' 'domains of action beyond those they [currently] recognise as possible' (Böck 2004: 285). In these sorts of ways, then, visual methods may not only allow for the excavation or illumination of the unthought or unstated, but also the recognition and potential transformation of habitus in the same sort of way as Bourdieu suggest can be achieved through 'socioanalysis' (see, e.g., Bourdieu 1999: 611; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 210-11; Wacquant 1992: 49).

Conclusion

It has been suggested above that, while we should avoid fetishising method - or employing any particular method for its own sake - visual methods of research may be particularly helpful in revealing or illuminating aspects of practice that are difficult otherwise to recognise or articulate. This includes Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, the deeply embedded sets of embodied dispositions which, according to Bourdieu, 'are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and … cannot even be made explicit' (Bourdieu 1977: 94). In this way it has been suggested that visual methods can help us to operationalise a concept which may be difficult otherwise to uncover or investigate, in part because if its vagueness and indeterminacy, but also and more significantly because of the difficulty of speaking about that which, whilst it informs both the smallest and largest of our actions and gestures, and constitutes our overall orientation to or way of being in the world, we may simultaneously be all but 'unaware' (Bourdieu 1999: 621). Where respondents are directly involved in this process, the uncovering or illumination of habitus through visual methods may also help to effect the sort of potentially radical shifts in self-understanding that Bourdieu argues can be achieved through the educative or research process.

It may be that some of these processes can be formalised. Alan Latham (2004) outlines a process he refers to as the 'diary-photo-diary-interview method' which

he recently employed to uncover and illuminate aspects of his informants' spatial practices, and – more specifically – their journeys through their everyday lives, a sequential technique in which participants wrote about, photographed, and were then interviewed about, life in urban New Zealand. Various aspects of these accounts – written texts, photographs, handwritten notes - were then combined to produce impressionistic diagrams of the participants' movements through their everyday lives. One could also employ photographic inventories (as described by Charles Suchar (2004) in relation to his study of processes of gentrification in Amsterdam and Chicago), to systematically investigate various aspects of habitus and lifestyle, using photographs of all the retail outlets in a particular high street or shopping mall, for instance, to investigate consumption behaviour, and the processes of potentially unreflexive self-selection (and unthought-out narrowings of possibilities) which go towards constructing people's paths through these and similar environments.

Finally, it should be noted that visual methods can also be employed to investigate absences, the invisible and the no-longer there, thereby potentially contributing, for example, to an understanding of shifts in habitus as a response to changes over time. David Byrne and Aidan Doyle's (2004) exploration of responses to and different ways of inhabiting the post-industrial landscape in the North East of England, for instance, asked participants to explore their thoughts around a sequence of photographs depicting the elimination of all significant traces of the mining industry in parts of Tyneside, where images of absences

were just as significant and revealing as those depicting phenomena that were still in existence (figure 8). And to return to Magda Segal's fridges, such images can be used to elicit information not simply about what they reveal and contain, but also about what they do not: about absences and choices not made, and the way such 'non practices' relate to other aspects of participants' lifestyles.

Figure 8: Former site of Crown Tower, Westoe Colliery (© Aidan Doyle; Source: Knowles & Sweetman 2004: 173)

Such additional possibilities notwithstanding, the above has attempted to indicate how visual methods may be particularly helpful in investigating areas that are difficult otherwise to verbalise or articulate, including Bourdieu's understanding of habitus. It has also suggested that, where research participants are directly involved in this process, we can also use visual methods to help in the development of forms of critical self-awareness of the sort that Bourdieu attributes to 'socioanalysis' (Bourdieu 1999: 611), and which may help to restore to people a sense of both the social forces which impact upon their lives (Bourdieu 1999: 628) and 'the meaning of their actions' (Bourdieu 2004a: 595). In this sense, visual methods may also play a small part in helping research participants not simply to better understand, but perhaps also to transcend (at least in terms of their own understanding) their taken-for-granted boundaries and self-policed – if practical and realistic – limitations.

Notes

[1] Intended to 'transcend' the 'usual antinomies' (Bourdieu 1990a: 55) of structure and agency (Bourdieu 1990b: 13) and 'opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories' (1990a: 56) the concept is 'guided by the desire to reintroduce the agent's practices, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation', whilst also emphasising that this creative capacity is 'not that of a transcendental subject' but of 'an acting agent' (1990b: 13), or – in other words – whilst properly acknowledging sociological and other forms of constraint.

[2] See Bourdieu (2000), for a discussion of his Algerian fieldwork in the 1960s and the 'quasi-laboratory situation' this offered for observing the 'mismatch between economic dispositions fashioned in a precapitalist economy and the economic cosmos imported and imposed … by colonization' (Bourdieu 2000: 18); see also Bourdieu (2004a) for a consideration of the potential difficulties and embarrassment such self-awareness can cause.

[3] Whilst not referring to a reflexive habitus as such, Bourdieu himself points out that 'in rapidly changing societies, habitus changes constantly, continuously', albeit 'within the limits inherent in its originary structure' (2002: 31), and argues that, 'Casualization of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity' (1998: 85). He also refers to 'the *destabilized habitus* produced by insecurity' (Bourdieu 1998: 98, my emphasis), and notes that the 'The generalization of electronics, IT and quality standards, which requires all wage-earners to retrain and perpetuates the equivalent of school tests within the enterprise, tends to reinforce [this] sense of insecurity [along] with a sense of unworthiness, deliberately fostered by the hierarchy' (Bourdieu 1998: 99), adding that in this context, 'clerks and technicians' are 'always on sufferance because they are permanently required to prove themselves' (Bourdieu 1998: 100).

[4] As Bourdieu points out: 'occupants of precarious positions' can be obliged to become '"practical analysts": situated at points where social structures "work," and therefore worked over by the contradictions of these structures, these individuals are constrained, in order to live or survive, to practice a kind of self-analysis, which often gives them access to the objective contradictions which have them in their grasp, and to the objective structures expressed in and by these contradictions' (in Bourdieu *et al* 1999: 511).

[5] As Bourdieu points out, 'when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted' (in Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 127).

[6] A similar point is made by Bourdieu when he notes the difficulties of conveying to an academic audience the extent of the shift necessary for Algerian peasants to accept an economistic view of the world given the strength of his readers' own 'deeply embodied presuppositions which make [them] perceive the economic conducts current in [their] own economic world as self-evident, natural and necessary' (Bourdieu, 2000: 23).

[7] See note 6, above.

[8] Or as Reay puts it, 'a means of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings' (Reay 2004: 439)

[9] For a critique of Bourdieu's 'structural nostalgia' in this respect (the same as that which, for Jennifer Craik (1994), allows fashion to be falsely claimed as a modern western phenomenon in contradistinction to 'traditional', non-western dress), see Silverstein (2004).

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