

SLOVENSKÝ NÁRODOPIIS

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Material culture ethnography in the foothills
of the Sierra Nevada

DJURIŠIČOV Á, Danijela: Material objects
as evidence of supernatural harm

GIBAS, Petr: Ballet amidst fences: Placelessness
and place-attachment in one Prague suburb

PAUKNEROV Á, Karolína: Two prehistoric cultures
in one flatland: A phenomenological analysis of landscape

LUTHEROV Á, Soňa G.: Investigating the visual
dimension in material culture research on the home

MENTEL, Andrej: Human evolution, social revolution
and silence about sex (Interview with Chris Knight)

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It gives us great pleasure to introduce the second English-language issue of the journal *Slovenský národopis/Slovak Ethnology*, this time devoted to the topic of material culture. In ethnographic studies in Central and Eastern Europe material culture has been approached as a component of so-called 'traditional culture', consisting of 'material' and 'spiritual' parts. These spheres have been used as a classificatory framework for 'traditional' phenomena and have usually been studied separately. As a result, conventional ethnographic studies of material culture consisted for the most part of descriptions and typologies of material objects referring to their production as well as their function in various technologies of production.

The object of study of social sciences and humanities is social phenomena. If, therefore, social scientists study material objects, they must investigate them in connection with social and spiritual aspects of culture. We believe that the task of the social sciences and humanities is to concentrate on the social context in which material objects appear and exist rather than on the technological aspects of their production and use. There are many interrelated questions in this connection: an influence of material objects on human behaviour and the formation of social relations; the role of human behaviour and social relations in the production and use of material objects; representations and beliefs concerning material objects and people's attitudes to them; social and cognitive aspects of technological development and transmission of technologies. The ways that physical objects are incorporated into people's life determine the way that society works and communicates its features to individual members. This also leads to social scientists' concern with the media, ranging from mass consumer goods to mass media and art.

Thus the ethnological/anthropological study of material culture offers a variety of directions of research. The contributions in the present issue discuss several topics from this broad spectrum: material culture in the context of migrations, the role of material objects in supernatural beliefs, relation between space and settlement formation, and the use of visual methods in studying material objects.

Kateřina Wildová deals with the topic of habitation and people's attitudes towards objects of everyday use. Her research has been focused on a group of immigrants from Western Europe living in southern Spain. The paper therefore also contributes to migration studies, and in a rather unconventional way: it does not address migration to urban settings in western countries in order to obtain material benefits; on the contrary, it deals with migration from the world of consumption to the countryside, which people envisage as an area offering the possibility of an alternative way of life.

Danijela Djurišićová's article aims at investigating the distinction between two basic categories of supernatural harm – witchcraft and sorcery – in relation to material objects. Using current theories of cognitive anthropology and psychology, the author explains an intricate connection between social relationships and different representations of supernatural harm. The material from Central Serbia demonstrates that although the concepts of witchcraft and sorcery imply 'immaterial' influence, material objects play a crucial role in people's representations: they are perceived as evidence of supernatural harm and belong to the basic aspects of magical practices.

The present issue also brings two articles on phenomenological geography. Petr Gibas' paper contributes to the investigation of suburbanization and gentrification. The author deals with a transformation of a former industrial village near Prague into an area with

luxurious houses. He focuses on the connection between changing space and socio-economic changes in the place. The paper of Karolína Pauknerová, on the other hand, takes us back to the distant past: her research is concerned with settlement patterns in the eneolithic period and the Bronze Age. It might seem that this article belongs more to the sphere of archaeological studies than in an ethnological/anthropological journal. We believe, however, that its orientation towards perception of space and land makes it worthy of the attention of scholars outside archaeological circles.

Soňa G. Lutherová's article is dedicated to investigation of the visual dimension of material culture in relation to the study of home. She demonstrates the importance of the methods of visual anthropology in a specific case of people's perception of home through design and choice of furniture. The paper also aims to confront two different branches of social anthropology – visual anthropology and anthropology of material culture of home – in the example of the author's research on individual home construction by young people in contemporary Bratislava.

The other rubrics refer to the topic of material objects as well. The rubric Essays/Overviews is dedicated to visual anthropology, as is the preceding article: it brings an overview of the development of ethnological/ethnographic film in Serbia by Dragana Radojičić. We are pleased that we can offer the readers of *Slovak Ethnology* an interview with Professor Chris Knight, who is one of the most prominent figures in the field of palaeoanthropology and evolutionary anthropology and had until recently been teaching at the University of East London. As usual, our journal brings book reviews as well as news about the scientific community in Slovakia.

We believe that the contributions in the present volume will draw the readers' attention to important aspects of ethnological/anthropological research and will be useful in the further investigation of material objects in the social world.

Tatiana Bužeková and Michaela Ferencová

INVESTIGATING THE VISUAL DIMENSION IN MATERIAL CULTURE RESEARCH ON THE HOME

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In qualitative research, visual data have the potential to reveal information and knowledge that would hardly be accessible through any other means. This perspective is potentially valid for any kind of research on social phenomena, even more so for research on the material culture of home that originates in the analyses of people's appropriation of domestic environment through their visually perceivable design and furnishing choices. However, anthropologists of material culture often prefer other types of research methods, they rarely draw upon the theories and methods of visual anthropology, and they approach visual data intuitively or use them in a purely illustrative way. In this paper, I address the approach to the theme of home and housing in projects from two different branches of social anthropology – visual anthropology and the anthropology of the material culture of home. Also, I address these methods with a preliminary analysis of the visual data from my own research on the individual's construction of home among young people in contemporary Bratislava, Slovakia.

Keywords: material culture, home, visual data, visual anthropology

Introduction

Let's focus on why things matter to people! Let's not rely on what they say, though, on their words and description – let us find out what they *really* do in the private worlds of their homes! This appeal was formulated by Daniel Miller, one of the leading personae of the social anthropology of material culture (Miller, 1998, 2001). Yet, as he also points out, things and belongings as matters of research interest are unfortunately mute and thus, when we are analysing our domestic sphere they cannot help with 'explaining' the studied phenomena. However, when we focus on the second agent in the object – subject relationship, i.e. the subjects, we realize that the meaning of things in people's lives is often

greater than they are aware of. Because of that, according to Miller, anthropologists should involve ethnographic observation when researching material culture (Miller, 1998).

Within social anthropological research into housing, an engagement with the visual environment of the home is often necessary. In this sense, the methodology of material culture research overlaps with the scope of another sub-discipline of social anthropology for which work with visual data is the main goal, namely visual anthropology. Like the material culture research on the objects that create our home environment, visual anthropology is 'not about the visual per se but about a range of culturally inflected relationships enmeshed and encoded in the visual' (MacDougall, 1999, p. 288). According to Marcus Banks, the studying or incorporation of images in the creation or collection of data might provide sociological insight that is not accessible by any other means (Banks, 2007, p. 4). Paradoxically, anthropologists working with the material culture of home only rarely use the knowledge of visual anthropology.

The aim of this study is to engage with the theme of home and housing in material culture projects on the one hand and visual anthropology on the other. Focusing on selected work, I analyse in the study how (and whether) anthropologists researching the material environment of home work with visual data and I search for a possible intersection between the two areas of anthropological research.

My main motivation in this matter is my own research on the social aspects of material culture. In the research project of my dissertation thesis I discuss the housing of young people in contemporary Bratislava, namely the relationship between their construction of the category of ownership and that of home. In this study I do not focus on the theme of ownership that I have followed more closely in the past, also in the pages of *Slovak Ethnology* (Lutherová, 2009). By contrast, I focus on the analysis of the visual environment of home that represents the primary research terrain of my dissertation project.

The core of my fieldwork consisted of continuous in-depth interviews with ten young couples living in Bratislava. During the research I asked my respondents to choose one place in their dwelling that makes them feel most at home, and take a photo of it. When I tried to confront the collected visual data with data from other studies of the material culture of home I realized that anthropologists quite often operate with visual data intuitively, without a more precise definition of their methodological approach, or they use it only as an illustrative addendum to the theoretical text itself. In this study, my aim is to delineate possible ways of working with visual data in the analysis of home environment in the context of my own research project.

In the first part of the study I characterize the issue of visual methodology in the context of social-scientific research from the points of view of visual anthropologists. Furthermore, I specifically focus on the issue of visual data analysis in the context of home environment – using concrete examples from visual-anthropological studies I illustrate the ways in which visual anthropologists approach the analysis of housing. In the second part of the study I focus on the approach of anthropologists of material culture to the visual environment of home and I characterize how a combination of the visual-anthropological approach to data and the methodology of the anthropology of material culture of home results in projects dealing with the sensory environment of home (Pink, 2004). At last, I describe an application of the conclusions to the visual data collected during my own research of the housing of young people in Bratislava.

Visual representations, images, are ubiquitous in society. Social anthropologists encounter them daily and constantly, as well as do the subjects of their researches. According to Banks, this potentially presupposes the inclusion of visual representations

into all studies of society. At some level, their consideration should form a part of any anthropological analysis (Banks, 2007, p. 4). This brings out a paradox, the reluctance of social researchers to include the analysis of visual representations in their professional practice because of their uncertainty about what to do with them (Banks, 2001). According to MacDougall (1999), anthropology hasn't lacked interest in the visual, rather, its problem has always been what to do with it. This also applies to research on the material aspects of the domestic sphere – defined as the analysis of the way people construct themselves or are constructed by others in relation to the appropriation of home – particularly through their visually perceived design and furnishing choices (Miller, 2001).

In this study, I address the approaches to the issue of home from two different branches of anthropological research – from the field of visual anthropology and from the anthropology of the material culture of home, and I analyse how they can methodologically draw on each other's methods.

Why Incorporate the Analysis of Visual Data into Anthropological Research?

Beyond its own borders, the sub-discipline of visual anthropology is often exclusively perceived through the production of methodologically more-or-less backed up ethnographic films. Other outputs from the field of visual anthropology are likewise rarely perceived by the broader professional anthropological public as significant in their scientific contribution and except by the visual anthropologists themselves, are seldom perceived as being methodologically inspirational (Ruby, 2005). Banks and Morphy (1999) perceive the field of activity of visual anthropology from a broader perspective, defining it as an anthropology of visual systems, or of visible cultural forms. According to them visual anthropology has two main objectives. The first one is evident – it is the analysis of the visual means of disseminating anthropological knowledge itself. Opinions of visual anthropologists on how to achieve scientific validity in the different forms of anthropological presentation vary. However, the position of the Society for Visual Anthropology at the American Anthropological Association is clear in this matter. They argue that not all sociological knowledge of society can be presented in written form and that 'visual representations offer viewers a means to experience and understand ethnographic complexity, richness and depth'.¹

Aside from ethnographic film, other forms of multimedia presentation are coming to the forefront. A good example is the innovative research project of Jay Ruby, who carried out an ethnographic study of the social and cultural diversity of a community in Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago (Ruby, 2008). During his research he combined standard ethnographic methods (observation, in-depth interviews) with methods of visual anthropology (experimental video-ethnographies). When using visual methods, his aim was not the realization of an autonomous ethnographic film or video for educative purposes, but the creation of a 'reflexive video book'. He has published the process of the research as well as the related studies on a public website, where he has also offered space for discussion to the respondents and actors of his research (Ruby, 2006). The outputs of Ruby's project have included a multimedia CD with ethnographic profiles, combining text, images and video (Ruby, 2008). Another example of an alternative way of communication of anthropological knowledge can be the engaged interactive power-point presentations of Fadwa El Guindi (2004). As numerous anthropologists emphasize, the aim of introducing new forms of presentation is not the ambition to replace words with images, but the search for an accurate combination of the two for presenting any particular piece of work under given circumstances (Pink, 2004).

Despite the above-mentioned efforts Margaret Mead's statement still remains valid: social anthropology is a scientific branch imprisoned in its own addiction to words, and that is not only while collecting data, but also in the process of their analysis and the presentation of the findings (Mead, 2003). According to Morphy and Banks, however, Mead herself, in her visual-anthropological projects with Gregory Bateson, has failed to achieve the move from the understanding of visual anthropology as a mode of representation of anthropological knowledge towards visual anthropology as a study of people's own visual worlds, including the role of representation within the cultural and social process (Banks & Morphy, 1999, p. 13).

Thus we approach the second objective of visual anthropology, as defined by Banks and Morphy, that is even more crucial in regard to the subject of interest of this paper. According to these authors, visual anthropologists should analyze and define the properties of visual systems and determine the specifications of their interpretation, explore how things are seen and how what is seen is understood, as well as relate particular systems to the complexities of the more general social and political processes of which they are part. 'Theory in visual anthropology revolves around the issues of visual culture, the structuring of the visible world and how visual phenomena are incorporated within cultural processes and influence the trajectory of socio-cultural systems' (Banks & Morphy, 1999, p. 21). In this context, visual anthropology is a body that includes the anthropology of art, the anthropology of material culture, and the anthropology of ritual form.

Visual anthropology is, consequently, concerned with the recording of visual or visible phenomena, more precisely with obtaining visual data (Banks & Morphy, 1999). However, there are few if any particularly distinctive or brand-new methods of visual data collection and it is possibly more accurate to consider this as adding a visual dimension to conventional methods of data collecting, or rather accentuating and systematizing those already present (Banks, 2007, p. 59).

Firstly, visual research includes the use of visual methods in social-scientific practice: from photographs and videos to the creation of schemes, diagrams and maps that serve scientists in the further analysis of the various aspects of social life. Secondly, visual research is based on the collection and analysis of visual representations that refer to the researched subjects, whether they have been created or consumed by them. In other words, what we have on the one hand is the use of images to study society and, on the other, the sociological study of images. Both of these groups of methods generally tend towards the exploratory rather than the confirmatory approach (Banks, 2007).

My aim is not to offer an exhaustive overview of the various methods of visual analysis that are complexly outlined in numerous summarizing works (e.g. Banks, 2001; Banks, 2007; J. Collier & M. Collier, 1986). I will return to the individual approaches to dealing with visual data further on in the study when confronting the visual-anthropological works in the context of the theme of home.

Visual Anthropology and the Theme of Home

Visual anthropologists are quite often confronted with the theme of home, whether it be in regard to its research and analysis using visual methods, or the depiction of a particular dwelling in ethnographic films.

In ethnographic films the dwelling is often the environment, the motif or itself the actor. The sphere of home creates the context of the subject as a bearer of the researched phenomenon. It may be an analogy of his/her social status, a personification of existing or absent social relationships, a materialization of the psychological state of the individual, or

perhaps his/her current life situation... The theme of home is also included in works such as Flaherty's classic film *Nanook of the North* (1922). The scene of building an igloo does not represent only a (more or less stylized) ethnographic recording of the everyday life of people in the north, but it also confronts viewers with the demanding conditions of life of the Inuits, as well as portraying the main character in a positive way.

Another methodologically more consequential example of drawing a relationship between a subject and his/her dwelling in ethnographic film is a scene from John Bailey's documentary *Amir* (1985). The musician Amir, an Afghani refugee, guides the film crew around his humble dwelling in the Pakistani city of Peshawar. For Amir, the tour around his property is not an opportunity for a simple stating and recapitulating of facts – it is rather a self-reflecting analysis, a possibility to reflect on his own status and everyday reality as a refugee (Banks, 2007). An unspoken quality of Bailey's approach lies in the shift of balance from the director's view and perspective on the material environment and its meaning to the respondent's. This trend also predominates in current ethnographic filmmaking, which tends towards reflexive approaches. The relationship between filmmaker and subject is perceived as both explicit and fundamental to the understanding of the movie. This tendency is formally reflected in a more frequent use of the subject's voice in a leading narrative role in the film (Pink, 2006).²

What is being captured in the scene where Amir gives a tour around his one-room home is in fact the visual-anthropological method of elicitation. What is elicited here is 'not merely a catalogue of physical features, but a narrative that uses those buildings and objects as containers for biographies and social knowledge' (Banks, 2007, p. 77). Some aspects of this method evoke other approaches to the material environment in the wider field of social anthropology, as for example that of Daniel Miller (Miller, 1998, 2001). This forms a basis for a possible methodological dialogue between visual anthropologists and researchers working outside the area of this sub-discipline.

A part of visual anthropology in a broader sense is the use, collection and analysis of visual data within the framework of a standard ethnographic study by either formalist (content analysis, ethno-methodology) or experiential and reflexive methods (Banks, 2007).

According to Collier there are only three basic means of scientifically analysing visual data: to measure, to count, and to compare (Collier, 2003).³ Collier argues that the primary research potential of visual methods is the observational camera, which offers accuracy of identification and objective details upon which researchers can base their judgments. His inclination towards positivism is reflected in his method of creating inventories that he has used in the project on the theme of adjustment of relocated Native Americans in the area of San Francisco Bay. Collier photographed all visible property in the living rooms, kitchens, and bedrooms in a sample of twenty-two homes. Methodologically, he focused on the nature of order and disorder in the domestic space, considering the way in which these immigrants have readjusted their decoration preferences to 'urban living' (Collier, 2003). According to Collier, visual research becomes far more complex and delicate in the private area of informants' homes, and the problems of rapport become increasingly challenging for researchers. To shed light on a seemingly disorganized mass of information, researchers have to make patterns and divide visual data into categories. In this sense, the creation of inventories consists of measuring, counting, and comparing. From Collier's perspective, homes are 'programs of culture in which the individual must find his image' (Collier, 2003, p. 239). In this context, the goal of a research project is to study the setting of home, to analyze the patterns of what he calls 'nonverbal contours of culture' and 'the visual symbols of personality' (Collier, 2003, p. 241).

A methodologically similar study of housing was carried out by Joseph Schaeffer in New York City. The researchers obtained audiovisual recordings from selected households made by stationary cameras programmed to record everyday life in households at regular time intervals, within periods of five to ten weeks. To begin with, researchers analysed behavioural patterns and spatial arrangements between the members of households, as well as the structure of communication associated with the use of space. Nevertheless, as Schaeffer shows, the acquired material was used in order to analyze various topics: from the theme of raising children to patterns of authority and dominance in the family, and from food-related behaviour to territorial arrangements (Schaeffer, 2003).

Both of the approaches described, Collier's as well as Schaeffer's, tend towards a similar position in relation to visual data – the task of a researcher is to record the visual data as accurately as possible, in order to analyze it as an objective capture of the studied phenomena. The approaches provide visual data that can be mapped, charted, and compared in relation to various themes and problems. This corresponds to Collier's perspective - that the value of the camera recording lies in its 'literacy', which allows diverse researchers to extract various significant levels of information from the obtained visual data (Collier, 2003; J. Collier & M. Collier, 1986). However, one can object that these approaches do not provide much space for expression on the respondents' side and that they therefore strongly impose the researchers' perspective upon the studied practice and phenomena. Finally, these methods also leave aside one of Banks' main demands of visual anthropology, that it should be experimental rather than confirmatory (Banks, 2007).

However, in accordance with the use of visual data in social research, there are other types of methods that originate in the reflexive approach and experiential methods. They consist of phenomenology, action research, drawing, psychoanalytic methods and the method of imagework (Banks, 2007). In principle, these methods resemble Miller's approach toward the materiality of home much more than the latter one. They put the emphasis on the respondents' part of the research chain: using visual data as means of stimulating other types of methods such as in-depth interviews, and enhancing the respondents' and the researchers' creativity and reflexivity.

In regard to the theme of the material culture of home, a good example is Edgar's use of the imagination-based research methodology of imagework (Edgar, 2004). This method consists of so-called 'active imagination' or 'guided fantasy', resembling the approach of Katathym-Imaginative Psychotherapy. In this method, the researcher tells the informant to relax and suggests an image to him/her, which he/she should picture in his/her mind as a sort of imaginative exercise.

In the case of Edgar's research, the imagination was thematically focused on the respondent's childhood household (his/her own or in the case of some special critical circumstances someone else's); in his/her imagination he/she should walk around the dwelling and look for a specific ritual and symbolic activity, which usually spontaneously consisted of the family's mealtimes or bathroom activities. After this, Edgar asked them to move forward in time and space into their current household and consider the similarities and differences between the imaginations with regard to the chosen activity. The aim of this project was to gather data about household change over two family generations. In relation to the subject's self-construction, this approach generates holistic data that combine rational and intuitive aspects of his/her self (Edgar, 2004). Imagework is designed to be accompanied (usually followed) by an interview, for example an oral historical one. The guided imagination raises themes, contexts, problems, and last but not least it recreates sights and the subject's emotions towards them that create a valuable input and leading line for the following interview.

This brief overview shows that there are different approaches towards the obtaining and analysis of visual data applicable and usable in relation to the theme of home and housing. However, these methods are very seldom used beyond the borders of visual anthropology, and even if they are, it is usually not explicit. In the following section, I will focus on the perspective of material culture research into the visual environment of home and how it can be combined with the visual approach.

From the Anthropology of Home to the Anthropology of Senses

Contemporary theoreticians of the material culture of home frequently use the concept of objectification, according to which people construct themselves and at the same time are being constructed through their relationships with cultural forms in the sphere of consumption (Miller, 1998). Such understanding of the essence and function of the process of consumption does not reduce the roles of subjects and objects. On the contrary – it defines them as equivalent agents, without privileging ‘society’ and its effect on the individual as a passive recipient.

According to Daniel Miller, home is the single most important site for material culture studies (Miller, 2001, p. 3). He understands it as a process in which the material environment and the inhabiting subjects are in a constant mutual relationship and transformation (Miller, 2001; Clarke, 2001). As Miller puts it, the main criterion in research on subject-object relationship should be a rather simple question, namely what matters to people (Miller, 1998). However, researchers cannot leave the answer to this question entirely to the studied actors and their judgments. As I have mentioned before, people have often perceived the artefacts that have mattered most in the process of social reproduction – and could occupy crucial positions in their lives – as unimportant and trivial.

The current of interest in the material culture ‘behind closed doors’ of the home is bringing forth new research contexts and impulses: ethnographic inquiry takes place in the private environment of subjects and calls for varied means of collecting data, from a thorough observation of what people actually do with things, e.g. their practice, to repeated, in-depth interviews (Miller, 1998, 2001). ‘For this purpose material culture must find some channel between a mere reportage of the voice of experience on one hand, and a merely formalistic application of a scheme of analysis on the other. We must have our own criteria for determining why some things matter’ (Miller, 1998, p. 12). In this case, however, researchers are not going to study some strange phenomenon in some foreign land. As Sarah Pink puts it, their research and everyday life become all the more significant as alteration and sameness are sought in more or less familiar contexts. This brings up the need for new forms of reflexivity and consciousness on the side of the ethnographer (Pink, 2004).

In relation to construction of home, what Miller and other researchers analyze is people’s agency, as well as their impotence (towards agency), in relation to the way they structure their home and the way they fill it with things, e.g. in their choices of furnishing and decoration (e.g. Miller, 2001; Clarke, 2001; Garvey, 2001; Búriková, 2006). These choices – visible and aesthetic qualities of home decoration and furnishing – are the results of a complex relationship between different identities, agencies, resources and relationships in the home (Pink, 2004).

It seems obvious that an approach that aims at examining the visual environment of home should inevitably consist of some kind of a visual analysis of data. However, this brings up an interesting paradox. Although researchers on material culture analyze the home environment in a very thorough way, they do not employ the various visual methods at hand, nor do they use ways other than words in presenting their data (e.g. Clarke, 2001; Marcoux, 2001). Their means of obtaining data usually lie in the methods

of interviewing and observation and their outputs are usually based on very detailed and lengthy descriptions of material environment, places and things (e.g. Miller, 2001, 2008). The descriptions and analyses are sometimes accompanied by pictures of objects and their arrangements. Nevertheless, they are often used in a purely illustrative and rather non-systematic way, being themselves objectifications of represented material objects. Although these pictures cannot be described as redundant, they objectify material agents in a way that 'mimics the objectification of human "others" in conventional ethnographic monographs' (Pink, 2006, p. 66). Also, these pictures as such express little about material agency, about the relationship between people and objects, or about their own materiality as photographs. According to Pink, it becomes obvious that visual representation is not a priority of this anthropology of home (Pink, 2006).

Sarah Pink's own work represents a valid step towards a successful employment of visual methods in the data analyses as well as in the presentation of the research outputs on the theme of the material culture of home. In her project she has conceptualized home as a sensory and material domain and explored it in the context of gender (Pink, 2004). As part of her reflexive research method she has used a camera during the interviews and asked her informants to give her a guided tour through their 'sensory' homes, discussing and showing what interested them most. As Pink describes: 'We had just one hour of tape and rather than waiting for events to unfold we have consciously used this technology within a constrained time period to explore and represent each informant's home and to discuss human and material relationships, sensations, identities, emotions, memories, creativity and activity associated with this domestic space and its material and other agencies' (Pink, 2006, p. 68). With visual as well as other sensory props, informants performed and talked about their everyday activities, as well as the objects and sensations involved. Thus they described verbally and through embodied performance what mattered to them in this context. Activities included housework, visual display, showing textures, playing music, and using light, sound, and smells to create atmosphere etc.

These recordings are products of a dialogue between the researcher, her informants, and the material context they have worked with. Obviously, they are not direct realistic representations of the everyday lives of the informants, yet this does not mean that they do not reveal something about the relationship between homes and their occupants in the course of their subjects' presentations. Hence, the data represent the view of the researcher through the camera and her informants' own representations of the intimate worlds they inhabit, as well as them themselves performed and presented to the camera (Pink, 2004). In relation to Pink's research question, an analysis of her visual data obtained through video interviews has revealed that each informant has used his or her home as a way of representing his/her gendered self (Pink, 2004).

As the end-product of the project, Pink has created a hypermedia CD-ROM integrating the visual and the spoken. The video clips are inserted into the text, which provides an anthropological framework for understanding the audio-visual representation of the 'sensory home'. Rather than situating her 'informants' views, actions and experiences within a "culture" through abstract theoretical discussion' (Pink, 2004, p. 168), the film allowed Pink to reflexively represent individual informants' embodied and sensory experiences of and in their homes. She does not have to describe the studied environment or translate it into the words, but rather, she shows it. In this way, the visual and the spoken are integrated into a whole, as opposed to a combination of written quotations, researcher's descriptions of the environment and illustrative photographs. In Pink's method, the visual is an integral part of the whole research.

Implementing the Visual Dimension in Material Culture Research of Home

In the spring of 2009, after I had conducted fieldwork on the themes of the home and property of young people living in Stockholm, Sweden, I considered various ways of designing my following in-depth interviews in Bratislava. I wanted to make sure that they would be as thorough and rich in data as possible. Since my PhD thesis focuses on the social aspects of the material culture of home, particularly on the way young people construct themselves in relation to the processes of home and property construction, I realized that my approach lacks focus on the material dimension *per se*, that it somehow got 'lost' in the process. That's the reason I decided to include visual methodology into my research: to be able to analyze the visual dimension of the material environment of my respondents' homes, but without imposing my own perspective upon it.

As researchers studying the theme of home from various perspectives and branches of social anthropology likewise claim, it is a delicate situation when the researcher enters a respondent's private domain to conduct research there (e.g. Miller, 2001; Collier, 2003; Pink, 2004). According to Miller, this is the place where most of what matters to people is happening (Miller, 2001). However, the data obtained at respondents' homes is usually not straightforward in its nature. To give an example, the private does not simply equate to the personal as it might seem and due to this, homes are rather arenas of constant processual negotiations of selves. Also, the process of home creation cannot be read as a mere expressive activity as such, there are many contradictions and tensions in our relationship towards our homes that impose their agency upon us, as we do upon them (Miller, 2001).

In my approach towards the material environment of home (and in sympathy with Pink's focus on the 'sensory home'), I am trying not only to study the expressive nature and emotional import of how informants talk about and appropriate their homes, but also to include the analysis of informants' embodied experiences of home (Pink, 2006). Consequently, a part of my research approach lies in the visual-anthropological method of collaborative photo-elicitation.

The main part⁴ of my fieldwork consisted in repeated in-depth interviews with ten young couples that I conducted in the course of nine months of my research.⁵ The initial interviews took place directly in respondents' dwellings, which gave them an opportunity to be in direct interaction with the environment of their homes. After the interviews I asked each respondent⁶ to take a photograph of the place that most evokes a feeling of home for them. The selection of the key on the basis of which they were to choose the place was in their hands. However, I instructed them to choose only one place and, if possible, to capture it from different angles. Together with the photos they also sent me a filled-out written questionnaire⁷ describing their choice and the place it had been related to. This way, I engaged respondents in a reflexive activity, thematically connected with the research. More importantly, I have assured myself of yet another access to their thoughts and perceptions that I find, in accordance with Banks, to be methodologically indispensable (Banks, 2007).

Since I am currently summarizing and analyzing the extensive material from the study, the following results have a preliminary character. However, it is possible to demonstrate the potential as well as the added value and new insights that this method provides to the in-depth micro-sample study.

In her picture,⁸ Katka took a windowsill in her kitchen. She sent me two pictures, taken from different angles. In the first one (Fig. 1), the camera looks directly at the windowsill, visually referring to Katka's answers in the questionnaire. She wrote that to her the place evokes 'summer, air, height, sun, wind', and she indicates that she likes to sit there, because

she is able to see outside as well as into the apartment. This aspect is reflected in her second photo (Fig. 2), which captures the interior of the apartment. Katka's reasoning, as well as her description of related activities, is deeply sensuous in its content. She tells how as she sits there in summer, she 'smells flowers, catches sun on her skin, and strokes her cat'. The atmosphere in her photos as well as the sensuous reasoning are in synchronicity with each other. In accordance with the theories of the sensory home, it represents the embodied experiences people have in relation to sensory aspects of their private places, but also the way they tend to use these kinds of experiences to construct representations of their homes.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

In accordance with this, I find the comparison of the photos of one couple, Fero and Lucia, very interesting. Without any previous agreement they both took a picture of the same sofa (although each of his or her own corner) (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). However, while Lucia's photo captures the vacant sofa with cushions, Fero has positioned himself directly in the picture's narrative; his photo is taken from his hand, showing his bare feet and the TV set he is looking at. In fact, the internal narrative of Fero's picture is not linked to his personal place as such, but more to himself and the activity he is performing there.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

In relation to this, there is one more detail I find interesting when analyzing Fero's picture. The eye of the spectator is instantly drawn to the presence of a woman in the television. It is she who dominates the internal narrative of the picture, once again leading our attention away from the homely place as such towards Fero's leisure activity, which is connected with it. I find this significant in relation to the way in which Fero constitutes his feeling of home and towards home through his picture. Similarly to Katka, he is trying to capture his own perceived sensation and the laid back atmosphere which he connects with the homely environment rather than the place as such. Fero's picture is an example of how necessary it is to distinguish form and content while analyzing photographs. Although interlinked, form often dictates and also mediates content (Banks, 2007).

The third example of the way respondents construct their feeling of home and homeliness is provided by another respondent – Štefka. In our interview, Štefka told me that she had known instantly what she would like to capture in her photo. She likes to cook, therefore she would like to take a picture of the spice cabinet (Fig. 5). Once again, the content of the picture is connected to a certain activity that the respondent performs in the environment of her home.



Fig. 5

However, it is interesting that in the related questionnaire, Štefka has written that the reason why she picked that place was that she liked to watch her girlfriend cooking. She has stated that she had chosen to take a picture because ‘those spices are used by my girlfriend to prepare food (for me ☺), and in the meantime I can look at her ☺.’⁹ Possibly to break the feminine gender related connotations that are normatively connected with the activity of cooking she has situated herself in the role of a passive, even male-like observer in a voyeur position towards her partner. Hence, what was constructed here was not only the representation of her feeling of home, and of her home-creation, but also the representation of her own personal gendered self.

When taking the photos, all the respondents had to consciously capture their own personal place that not only symbolizes their home, but also ‘refers’ to themselves. This way, they have more or less deliberately created a material representation of the way they construct their own home, as well as their feeling of homeliness in relation to their own, personal, self. The respondents had to decide not only what to capture, but how to capture it, and in what way, which is revealing in relation to the theme of home-construction.

Conclusion

There are many anthropologists who draw upon the current hype about material culture research and specifically upon the theme of home as its central arena. Although they often opt for an in-depth oriented holistic approach, they are usually not very eager to include a visual dimension and data into their analysis. Also when it comes to the analysis of individual taste and identity construction through aesthetic expression, they rather depend on their own observation-based judgement, and words, words, words... Even more so, they rarely throw the ball over to the respondents’ side, letting him/her reflexively cooperate in the research through means of visual representations. This way, they are losing the opportunity to gain yet another means of access to their subjects’ perception and thoughts. The methods of visual anthropology provide innovative, reflexive and experimental ways to approach and understand the subjects’ personal worlds of their homes from their own perspective. And not only their homes, but also the identities, agencies, relations, and relationships that create them.

In the second part of the paper, I have focused on the visual data from my own fieldwork in the study of individual construction of the concepts of home and property. The idea behind the use of this method was to analyze the way respondents represented their feeling of home and possibly to uncover deep emotions and other aspects of their lives that would be otherwise unavailable to me. When analyzing the photographs and related questionnaires one of Banks’ claims became clear: the photographs successfully exercised agencies, causing respondents to reflect on their well-known things and places from a new perspective (Banks, 2007). The data shed light on the way people construct their feeling of home, and homeliness. It showed that they tend to construct them by depicting the leisure activities they connect with it, and they tend to position themselves directly into the pictures’ narratives – revealing the construction of their private selves.

These findings strongly encourage anthropologists focusing on the material culture of home to include reflexive, experiential and embodied ways into the study of ‘why things matter to people’, and specifically how subjects communicate this by visual means.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 AAA Statement, 2001.
- 2 The theme of material culture of home and housing is not confined to classic ethnographic films, but is very current in the present as well. In the context of the last decade we can mention e.g. Mourão's intimate portrait of an older lady and her home in the film *A Dama de Chandor* (1998). In her film *Domov* (2000) Rosie Read analyzes the conceptualization of the category of home in the stances of informants in various life situations.
- 3 Except for the use of visual data as a projective tool during interviews, which he considers to be their secondary research potential (Collier, 2003).
- 4 Other methods of acquiring data that I have used included an observation of the respondents' home activities and behaviour as well as a visual analysis of the material environments of the respondents' dwellings.
- 5 In most of the cases the fieldwork consisted of the long initial in-depth interview with both partners of the couple, followed by repeated interviews and observation during the next months.
- 6 Every respondent on his/ her own.
- 7 The questionnaire consisted exclusively of open-ended questions to provide respondents with the space needed to reflect upon their action.
- 8 The photographs in this paper are used with the permission of their authors. To ensure the privacy of my respondents, I have changed their names.
- 9 The emoticons have been put into the text deliberately by the respondent.

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