The Child In The City
a case study in experimental anthropology

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FOREWORD

I was delighted that my book, The Child in the City, written in the 1970s, should be the starting point for a university-based course and the explorations described in this pamphlet. I am innocent of any academic discipline and The Child in the City was an eclectic mixture of research findings, reminiscences, observation and conversation. It did, however, have a didactic intention. Like several of my books, its subject was the popular and unofficial uses of the physical environment.

I warned readers to grasp the importance of the child's surroundings as a source of pleasure and of the skills needed for the mastery of the environment. As I explained in the preface to the 1990 reprint of the text I was surprised when it was assumed at meetings of social workers and teachers that the book was seen as one more catalogue of deprivation, rather than as a celebration of children's resourcefulness and of the intense, variety and ingenuity of the experience of urban childhood that I sought to convey.
However, the book also pointed to the erosion of the child’s freedom in the city by redevelopment for the benefit of property speculators and the out of town motorway. One student on The Child in the City course had read the book, and was conscious that quite often children in the environment are invisible unless you are actually looking for them. She told of the streets of Manchester and found that, apart from infania in gardens, there was now a child in sight.

My book had a chapter on “The girl in the background” observing that boys experienced, explored and explained the environment far more than girls. For one group in the project compared the capacity to explore the area of the central shopping area by observing groups of 13-14 year-old girls and boys and putting video equipment in their hands. The result showed a notable lack of cohesion among boys and far greater comprehension both in reaching agreement as a group and in exploiting the usefulness of the environment among girls.

Another project, with younger children, suggested that favourite places other than shopping centres, were the indoor environments of home. From the findings reported on pages 17-21 of this pamphlet it is hard to escape the conclusion that the turn of the century urban child is an indoor child. I am reminded of the long-term study conducted by Des John and Elizabeth Newman of the child development research unit at Nottingham University in the 60s and 70s. They asked 700 mothers, ‘Would you call him/her an indoor child or an outdoor child?’ They found, not surprisingly, both class and sex differences. In more spacious homes, children were more likely to have some place in the home which they could call their own and where they could keep their own things. Central heating enlarged usable indoor space, just as increased private motoring diminished outdoor space.

Members of the course discovered another midway difference between the 1970s and the turn of the century. It is no longer prudent for a resource person to attempt to engage in friendly conversation in the street, while schools are subject to so many pressures that it is difficult even there. The investigation can be linked in some way with the curriculum.

It was a pleasure to be present at the start and the finish of the course and to be spared all the practical and methodological problems that course members had to face on the way.
This pamphlet has its origins in a postgraduate course taught at the University of Manchester during the spring semester of 1998. The Research Issues course focused on *The Child in the City*, a book written by Colin Ward. Participating students were required to devise fieldwork projects which explored the experiences of children living in an urban environment.

The fundamental premise of the course was what Tim Ingold calls a ‘dwelling perspective’, that is, priority was accorded to learning through personal engagement with the world rather than through the mastery of an objective corpus of knowledge. Hence we began by considering personal experiences of childhood: is childhood a universal experience? How might personal reminiscence and memory feel into contemporary research? Does one’s own experience of childhood offer a special kind of empathy in exploring the lives of children in the city? From here we encouraged students to experiment with a wide range of research strategies in an attempt to find appropriate ways of working with children. The course culminated in an all-day workshop at which Colin Ward and Mike Dibb were present. Students presented their findings in the form of verbal presentations, photographs, video footage, multi-media, slides and sound recordings.

Although it is impossible to recreate the sheer density of materials presented at the workshop or the range of discussions pursued, our intention in publishing this pamphlet is to convey something of what we set out to achieve in the course. Specifically, we were interested in thinking differently about the relationship between research and teaching: we wanted to examine the nature of anthropological enquiry and methods of investigation; and we were interested in exploring the interplay between different kinds of knowledge and forms of communication. Importantly, too, we were seeking to push against the constraints of academic bureaucracy which increasingly circumscribe our discipline.

The pamphlet includes a selection of work from the different student projects along with a number of other short essays which address the substantive and methodological questions prompted by the particular focus of research. We were keen to expand the discussion of these questions, inviting additional contributions from two Manchester doctoral students (Natasha Solomons and Amanda Ravetz) whose work overlapped significantly with the major concerns of the course. As an appendix we include an interview with Mike Dibb, which reveals significant aspects of his approach towards documentary film-making. The two poles of the publication comprise a consideration of the subject matter of the course and reflection upon the processes of investigation. There is movement between these poles in Mark Harris’ and Amanda Ravetz’ articles. Ultimately, however, the final balance is uneven. We set out to explore the dimensions of children’s lives in the modern city; but, as the pamphlet took shape, it became clear that questions of ethnographic knowledge, techniques and form were emerging as the dominant concerns. The pamphlet is more about anthropology than it is about children.

The question of collaboration, however, serves to link the two.
theme of the Research Issues Course. Working together was central to
the learning process within the field and within the classroom. For
dexample, there was much discussion with students about how the
different kinds of collaborative relationships developed during research
might be conceived within the context of an academic workshop. In
preparing this publication, we were all aware of the lack of the
participation by children in our work. The importance of collaboration
with ethnographic subjects is now widely discussed within the
discipline, but as we discovered at every stage of the project, what this
means in practice and how it might find concrete expression in the
forms by which inter-subjective understandings are communicated are
difficult issues to resolve.

This publication brings together textual and visual materials. The
particular configuration of images and writing is an attempt to mirror
aspects of the course itself. On the one hand, the pamphlets may be
approached as a sort of collage in which meanings are generated
through the layering of material; on the other hand, it may be read
from cover to cover as a linear narrative.

The idea of a collage suggested itself as an appropriate form for a
number of reasons. For example, its texture evokes the distinctive
characteristics of the city—for radical juxtaposition, discontinuities, and
partial perspectives. Its layered quality expresses how memory works
as an important starting point for our enquiry into childhood. Finally
collage conveys something of the character of fieldwork-based
enquiry—in all its quality, the diversity and unanswerability of sources,
the present by which materials are collected, stored and assembled.

The pamphlets launch the new UK Pickly Pear Pamphlet series.
It builds on earlier essays published by Pickly Pear Press with their
range and experimentation with form. In particular, it takes seriously
the call to do anthropology differently. The creative renewal of
anthropology as an academic discipline depends neither on abstract
propositions nor on the codification of new areas of investigation. We
argue that anthropology needs to locate its project within the
contemporary world. We offer this pamphlet as a case study in how we
have tried to work experimentally. In doing so we have sought to

re-think the discipline in terms of its form of presentation, its methods
and its concepts. Only with such a mental can anthropology give full
and proper expression to the contemporary world, thereby making a
contribution to it.

Mark Harris
Anna Greenhow
Manchester
November 1999

Noves
In-pool, T. 1995. Building, Dwelling, Being. In M. Stedern (ed.)
The Participants

Celia Wani is the author of numerous books, including *Amnesty in Action, Streetcar and the Body Environment* (with Eileen Adams). She worked on the American newspaper *Amnesty* in the 1960s and is particularly interested in environmental education. Anita Grimshaw teaches at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology University of Manchester. She is the author of *A Paddock and a Cow: South Africa* (1995), and a forthcoming book, *The Ethnographer’s Eye: An Ethnographic Anthology*. Nicola Walker holds a Masters degree in Visual Anthropology, as a student at the Granada Centre, she participated in the Research Issues course. She is currently working for Live TV in Manchester. Carolina Giuntini is a doctoral student in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, exploring questions of landscape and knowledge in the Italian Alps. She was a participant in *The Child in the City* project. Madge Liebich has a Masters degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester and is currently pursuing her studies in Germany. Mark Harris, co-tutor with Anna Grimshaw of The Child in the City project, was a British Academy post-doctoral fellow in Manchester 1996-1999. He currently teaches at the London School of Economics and is the author of a forthcoming book, *Life in the Mangroves* (British Academy/Oxford University Press). Naiyu Bazika has a doctorate in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester. She worked with Asian children as a Church and discussed her research with students participating in *The Child in the City* project. Amanda Barlow is a doctoral student in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester. Her research in a Peninsular town is concerned with issues of knowledge and sense of place: the use of visual technology has been central to her ethnographic enquiry. Mike Dib is a documentary filmmaker. He directed the *Ways of Seeing* series with John Berger for the BBC and continues to make programmes for television. His most recent film, *Salvador Dali*, was transmitted in 1998.

This pamphlet could not have been produced without the work of all the students who took the Research Issues course. We are grateful for the lively participation of the following: Sandro Al Hassan, Caroline Alfred, Matthew Bennett, Alexis Gipp, Cristian Grassani, Ruth Hamill, Giorgina Heinowitz, Lorenzo Kirk, Melanie Liebich, Anna Melia, Marta Meyer, Beatriz Mosca, Mag Picket, Christina Swier, Apasini Theobald, Nicole Walker and Naiyu Bazika. In addition, we would like to thank all the parents, teachers and others who generously supported the students’ projects carried out for the Research Issues course. We are very grateful to the participants at the G.L.R. James Institute seminar, New York, where these ideas were discussed, especially Jim Murray, Don Kellicott, Adlele Obasan and Kate Ceban. Jon Bennett and Pete Wade of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester, were also instrumental in making sure the course ran smoothly. Graham Ciavatta, Peter Wade and David Mills read the manuscript and provided a number of valuable suggestions, for which we thank them particularly.

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Identity/agency and child's participation in the perception of childhood economy of place and space in the cityworld

Ethnicity, race, gender, class

Survival in the city

Exploring, discovering adult worlds

Learning, growth, development

Relationship, power, communication

Music, dance, movement, performance, play

Environment, ecology, landscape, imagination

Playing in balance

Natural world
THE CHILD IN THE CITY: NOTIONS TOWARDS AN EXPERIMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY
Anna Grimshaw

The idea of pursuing an experimental course in Research Issues for Masters and pre-fieldwork doctoral students evolved from a suggestion by the television director, Mike Dibbs. Over a number of years he and I had exchanged ideas about documentary filmmaking, exploring the implications of the very different ways in which we worked with the genre. It was out of these ad hoc conversations that the idea of a collaborative ethnographic project was generated.

Mike Dibbs was interested in making a series of documentary programmes based upon Colin Ward's study, The Child in the City; he raised with me the possibility of students, author, director and academic tutors working together to explore the central themes of the
book within the context of Manchester. As convener of the Research Issues course, I thought that Dibb's proposal offered a number of unusual opportunities. These were substantive and methodological, raising questions about the nature of anthropological work as about the focus of the research itself.

My primary concern in the account which follows is to outline some of the key ideas animating the research seminar series. I preface this account, however, with a short autobiographical statement. Its purpose is to contextualise aspects of The Child in the City project as a case study in experimental anthropology. It is always difficult to know where to start any kind of legitimating narrative or how to weave together what seem like disparate threads of individual autobiography into something which offers more general insight; but I was aware from the outset that I was bringing into the course certain questions which stemmed from my experiences as an ethnographer operating both inside and outside a university environment. I was interested in working with others to understand how The Child in the City project itself might re-frame such questions and raise new ones. For example, what is it that enables an approach so distinctly anthropological? How might ethnographic writing be distinguished from other kinds of social description?

If there is one issue which defines my intellectual trajectory as an anthropologist it is the problem of how to reconcile the subjectivity of fieldwork experience with the demands of academic discourse. My first attempt to redress this question led to an experiment in autobiographical writing or 'remembered ethnography' (Stories of the Buddha, Open Letters, 1992). Later, I sought to explore my own personal experience within a broader critique of modern anthropology and its consolidation as a professional discipline around the paradigm of scientific ethnography (Anthropology and the Crisis of the Intellectuals, Prickly Pear Press, 1993).

This shift from individual reflection to a more socially and politically oriented analysis was inseparable from my own transition back into academic anthropology. Such a movement shaped my commitment to ethnographic experimentation in different ways. Increasingly my energies were directed into working creatively with the established academic forms. Already I had discovered that it was not difficult to marshal arguments against the university-based discipline: But now, after a decade, I was part of it again. If it was easy to be against—against abstraction, disembodiment, specialisation, professionalisation—what was I for?

Keith Hart and I launched the Prickly Pear Pamphlet series in 1993 with the publication of a manifesto, Anthropology and the Crisis of the Intellectuals. Our intention was to open up a space where anthropologists and others might try out new ideas or forums of writing freed from the normal constraints of academic publication. It was important, however, in trying to foster more speculative approaches, that we resisted the pressure to make programmatic statements or articulate abstract conceptions of what might constitute a late twentieth-century project. Our argument was that innovations must be generated by the forging of a closer relationship between academic anthropology and social life. This was not a general question. It was about one's everyday practice as a teacher and ethnographer.

My interest in anthropological experimentation also stemmed from the unusual position I occupy as a visual anthropologist within a discipline dominated by words. Being located within the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology led me to devise different ways of working as a fieldworker and as a teacher. Specifically, I was concerned to avoid an instructional or handbook approach towards filmmaking, since it usually involved the fetishisation of technology and the reinforcement of certain conventions (e.g. television clichés). I became interested in devising exercises which encouraged students and myself to work in ways that challenged assumptions about ethnographic knowledge. My purpose was to develop an anthropological self-consciousness about the habitual ways in which we organised and interpreted social realities. These exercises were predicated on the students' own active participation in the learning process. By using the camera as an extension of ourselves, we sought to reorient ourselves as ethnographers in the world.

Working in this way as a teacher and fieldworker led me to reflect
critically upon a number of established ideas, techniques and forms in the modern discipline. I drew on my own experiences but, importantly, I was also influenced by those of my students too. An unusual dynamic began to emerge from these activities. For, at the same time as I was concerned to push against the limitations of academic anthropology, I also found myself seeking points of connection between contemporary innovation and other moments of experimentation in the discipline’s history. The attempt to do things differently had inevitably brought me into a new engagement with, and re-evaluation of, the familiar.

If, ironically, the marginal position I occupied as a visual anthropologist in a textually-based discipline brought about a much closer, creative relationship with the mainstream than I had ever imagined, it also served as a catalyst for the development of conversations with those who work in fields beyond the confines of the academic discipline. From my decade of work outside academic anthropology (first as a researcher in television, later as an assistant to the Caribbean writer, C.L.R. James), I had learned how ethnographic understanding was greatly enhanced by creative exchange with filmmakers, photographers, artists, poets and writers. Situated in the Granada Centre and aware of the scepticism shown by many anthropologists toward the visual media, I began to cultivate links outside the particular university in order to establish a broader context for thinking about ethnographic experimentation. It was out of such connections that the collaborative basis of The Child in the City emerged.

The Child in the City project was pursued within an existing postgraduate course devoted to research training. Already a number of innovations had been introduced by earlier tutors; thus, as an established teaching space, the Research Issues seminar series still presented itself as a challenge. How might anthropological experimentation be fostered in a climate of bureaucratic conformity and academic auditing? How is it possible to persuade students that they can take time to establish their own interests, explore a wide range of sources, experiment with unconventional research approaches and yet meet the formal requirements of an approved course?

One of the most important opportunities offered by the Research Issues course was the possibility of bringing together an unusual range of participants. The fact that Collins Ward and Mike Dibb were not part of university life served as a refreshing reminder of the artificial limitations established around much academic study; and the participation of Mark Harris, a British Academy postdoctoral fellow, was critical in focusing issues concerning method and form given his own intense engagement with such questions as a new member of the profession. Equally critical to the attempt to foster an open, eclectic approach to research questions was the particular constituency of students. For the course was unique in combining the interests of postgraduates following the Masters programme in Visual Anthropology at the Granada Centre with other Masters and PhD students pursuing text-oriented research. Indeed discussion about the kinds of knowledge generated by means of different fieldwork techniques and technologies was central to the course from its very beginning. So, too, was debate about form.

Project history

The Child in the City has issues concerning education and environment at its core. As the course convenor, Mark Harris and I were interested in transposing Ward’s understanding of such questions to the particular pedagogical process with which we were ourselves engaged. Hence the impulse of the research seminar series was learning by doing, rather than learning through formal instruction. Linked to the central concern of what might learning from adopting an ethnographic perspective, was the question of technique—how might we learn? In seeking to pursue these matters within an anthropological context, we were animated by the eclectic, open-ended and enquiring spirit of The Child in the City. Ward’s approach was complemented by the particular style of documentary filmmaking which Mike Dibb has pursued in television for many years.

The desire to intervene within an established teaching course was not something we conceived abstractly. It was an integral part of our enquiry. But our commitment to experimentation with ethnographic method and form was also critically shaped by the substance of the
research. Irrespective from the reflexive examination of how we might explore the world as ethnographers was our concern to examine a range of techniques and technologies appropriate to the understanding of the child in the city. Both elements of the research, children and cities, and the nature of their relationship as suggested by the title of Woolf's book, forced us to address questions about established strategies of anthropological investigation. For example, is there a predominance of language-based methods in social science research (the interview, conversation, explanations, arguments) but are there appropriate means by which children's engagement with the world may be conveyed? How may other dimensions of their lives in a city landscape be suggested? How might adults, themselves once children, access their own experiences and evoke an empathetic connection with their subjects? What forms (stories, drawings, sound recordings, photographs, videos) might be most effective in expressing rather than describing a child's perspective of the world? Finally—and perhaps most importantly—what are the ethical implications of working with children? How might researchers negotiate relationships with their subjects and guardians (parents, teachers, etc.) in a climate of social panic surrounding children?

Anthropology in Manchester

The Child in the City project was based in Manchester. This context was critical in shaping both the research and our own orientation to questions of ethnographic work. From the classic nineteenth-century accounts of the city by de Tocqueville, Engels and Mrs Gaskell, to its long-running soap-ops, Coronation Street, and the contemporary novels of Jeff Noon, Manchester has been extensively documented as a city. It has a unique identity, stemming largely from the critical place which Manchester occupies in the history of Britain's emergence as an industrial nation. Following decades of decline, the city is today undergoing a renaissance which observers often call its second industrial revolution. Late twentieth-century Manchester has become a focus for the development of business based on new information technology. Moreover the city itself, for many years a wasteland of abandoned warehouses and cheap public housing, is again becoming a place in which people live, work and socialise.

We were interested in discovering where children figured in Manchester's contemporary transformation, since their location within urban space raises a set of questions about the nature of the city's post-industrial renaissance. Taking children as a focus offered a new perspective on the nature of a contemporary city. Conversely, the location of our research project within urban space enabled us to interrogate the category of the child, sensitising us to the different ways in which constructions of childhood were shaped by particular contexts.

Manchester suggested itself as an appropriate location in which to pursue the concerns of our research seminar series for another important reason. The city is synonymous with a distinctive movement in anthropology's evolution as an academic discipline. The Manchester School, emerging in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, consolidated around the work of Max Gluckman and his associates. It was marked by an explicit orientation toward the exploration of urban contexts; and it involved the development of an anthropological perspective toward questions concerning people and modern cities. Equally significant to the Manchester School's crystallisation of an intellectual identity was the engagement of key figures, especially Gluckman, Mitchell, Epstein and Turner, with questions concerning the techniques of ethnographic enquiry. The School's methodological innovations (for example, the development of the extended case study, institutional and network analysis, or the social theatre approach), pursued within the context of collaborative or team-work, were the critical counterpart to the new theoretical concerns of the Manchester anthropologists. From the outset we attempted to find ways of creatively incorporating the legacy of the Manchester School within the research project we devised. Hence at a number of different levels—substantive, methodological and contextual—we were mindful of the connections between our contemporary interests and those of our predecessors. We, too, were concerned with urbanism but we set out to explore it from the perspective of the child; we experimented with a
number of different techniques and technologies in search of methodologies appropriate to the focus and site of our ethnographic investigations, and we operated with a collective ethos fostering the creation of team-based research projects. At the same time we also sought to connect our work with more recent developments in the Manchester departments. For, although the death of Max Gluckman in 1975 marked the end of a certain intellectual phase in the modern discipline, Manchester-Bantu anthropology continued to have a distinctive profile which set it apart from the other main focus of the subject, namely Oxford and the University of London.

We identified the writings of Tim Ingold as an important resource for our interest in a reflexive investigation of fieldwork-based enquiry. Drawing upon his understanding of technique, landscape and knowledge, we transcribed Ingold’s ideas back on themselves in an attempt to address questions about how ethnographers come to know the world anthropologically.

We also found a focus for these reflexive concerns through the experimentation with different media as an integral part of the research project. Hence we built upon work pursued at the Granada Centre. The aim, however, in encouraging students to use a range of tools and techniques (for example, stills photography, sound recordings, interviews, photo elicitation and participant observation) was to interrogate the nature and status of the discipline’s epistemological claims. We sought to highlight the different kinds of ethnographic knowledge which might be generated through the use of certain fieldwork strategies and technologies. For the principal objective of the course was to stimulate questions from students about the nature of anthropological enquiry, rather to instruct them in a range of research methods.

Fieldwork techniques and technologies in anthropological enquiry

The creation of ethnographic techniques is a vexed one within the modern discipline. It was critical to the new kind of anthropology being pursued by Boas, Rivers and Haddon at the turn of the century as they sought to transform what had hitherto been a speculative project of Victorian gentlemen into a fully-fledged scientific enterprise. The early training of these key figures had been in the natural sciences. They carried with them into their fieldwork explorations the methodological preoccupations characteristic of a late-nineteenth-century laboratory culture. Their work was characterised by an experimentation with tools and techniques as an integral part of investigations’ concern with the status of evidence and the problem of subjectivity in the creation of knowledge.

Hence the fieldwork undertaken by Boas, Haddon or Baldwin Spencer involved a transposition of the laboratory to the ethnographic site. Teams of investigators pooled their different interests, skills and techniques in order to generate data for scientific, interpretative. There was also great enthusiasm for the latest instrumentation.

The presence of an elaborate range of fieldwork tools and a prevailing sense of anxiety about methods of investigation were suggestive of both the archaic and precocious nature of twentieth-century anthropology. For these features may be interpreted as relics of an older Victorian project about science, technology and the ultimate knowability of world; or, in their interrogatory rather than illustrative function, they may be taken to be evidence of anthropology’s modernism. But as Schaffer sharply comments, this early reductiveness was ‘systematically suppressed and then denied in the inmost and fiercest realm of subsequent fieldwork.’

Although the nature of Malinowski’s ‘evolution’ has been much debated in anthropology, it is clear the question of method changed significantly during the 1920s. Malinowski may now be more accurately described as someone who extended rather than invented modern anthropology’s fieldwork orientation but it remains important, nevertheless, to acknowledge the distinctive role he played in establishing a new kind of ethnographic knowledge based on a personal transformative experience. Modern anthropological fieldwork was no longer discussed in terms of the problems of method. It became an initiation in which the ethnographer’s body, stripped of all the trappings of industrial civilization, was exposed to certain experiences. Pinney’s image of the new fieldworker is a compelling
one. The anthropologist's exposure to data... occurred during a
period of invention from his normal reality, a stage which is formally
analytical to the production of the photographic sequence when all the
important rays of light which guarantee the indelible truth of the
image are allowed to fall on the negative's emulsion.7

Moreover, the dialogues between Maltoskiw claimed he did an
as fieldworker and what he actually did ushered in a new secrecy about
method. The techniques and tools of modern ethnographic enquiry
became invisible and narrowed to writing (the lone ranger with a
notebook); and the establishment of the monograph enabled a
certain kind of literary text as the form by which all ethnographic
knowledge was communicated.

It is important to acknowledge the influence of the particular object
of study in underlining the subtleties but gradual shift in fieldwork
method during the course of the discipline's professional consolidation
and academic expansion. For the modern ethnographers after
Maltoskiw were typically studying what they constructed as "simple"
societies; societies existing outside time and space; small-scale, non-
industrial communities classically presented as ordered, integrated and
coherent. These images of native society were built upon an explicit
ejection of mechanical civilisation and its associated technologies. The
ordering and coherence of native life was created through the use of
certain narrative devices or forms of classification whereby the "the
ethnography of ethnographic holism" was achieved.8 It was created by the
photographer's journey through the field or by the logic of the
connection between categories (kinship, economy, etc.).

The critique of scientific ethnography during the 1960s called into
question the object, method, concepts and form of anthropology as it
had developed after Maltoskiw. Many ethnographers, recognising the
fundamentally different premises of their work, began to experiment
with an expanded range of techniques and forms. Specifically, there
was a recognition that the coherence of the classical fieldwork site was
illusory, and a growing interest in montage as a form appropriate for
new ethnographies of a late twentieth-century world.9

The essential concept of The Child in the City research project
were shaped by the current mood of experimentation and reflectivity in
contemporary anthropology. We were committed to innovation in the
area of technique and form; and we were interested in exploring how
anthropology might be pursued as an intellectual project under the
conditions of late modernity—that is, we recognised the problematic
status of the "field," the need to devise new collaborative working
relationships and the importance of intermingling questions concerning
the methodological and epistemological assumptions of an
ethnographic approach. The methodological, conceptual and formal
concerns at the heart of the Research Issues course returned us to
many of the preoccupations of the discipline's early pioneers; but, of
course, we carried with us the troubled consciousness of
anthropology's evolution as an academic discipline over the course of the
interesting century.

The Child in the City fieldwork tools, tasks and techniques

Students participating in The Child in the City project experimented
with a range of fieldwork strategies in their efforts to evoke the lives
of contemporary children within urban space. From the outset we
hoped that something interesting might emerge from the unusual
consistency of postgraduates with whom we were working. As I noted
earlier, the course involved students training as ethnographic
filmmakers with others following a writing-based approach to
anthropological research. But we were especially concerned to
transcend the conventional opposition between image and text which
has become such an established part of anthropological debate about
technique and form. Hence all students were encouraged to use stills
photography, video, sound recordings, participant-observation,
interviews, children's drawing and stories, imaginative and other kinds
of writing as complementary methods of ethnographic inquiry.

Interestingly the key question which crystallised in people's minds was
not about the superiority of one medium over another; instead, it
concerned the possibility of expressing, rather than merely describing,
the perspective of the child. What strategies were most suited to this?
How might different media be combined to provoke questions rather
than illustrate answers? How might one suggest what Mead and Bateson, in their pioneering study of Malinowski childhood, called 'ethos', the intangible texture of social life which cannot be described but only glimpsed and evoked[26].

**Bodily techniques and writing**

We began the course by asking students to come to the first session with an idea, an image, a description or a quotation from Colin Ware's book which had caught their attention. Each selection was then summarized under a particular heading. At the end of an hour the seminar room blackboard was covered with a scattering of key words.

There was no ordering to the words, rather we looked at a striking visual representation of particular focal points joined together through a series of random connections. Such a diagram, constituted by its spontaneous juxtapositions, suggested all kinds of new relationships and possibilities previously unimagined. Moreover, in addition to its spatial extension it allowed simultaneous levels of association such that certain feelings (empathy, fear, trust) could be evoked simultaneously with concepts (territory, play, conflict, consumption) and contexts (school, home, street, shop).[26]

The purpose of our exercise was to open up a series of different pathways through a research landscape, freeing students to choose their own points of entry and to experience the process of ethnographic enquiry as a speculative or exploratory journey consisting of clues, false trails and flashes of insight in which imagination and analysis are drawn upon in equal measure. The opening exercise of the course also served another purpose. It established the mood of conversation as the form by which we sought to generate ethnographic understandings. For, as David MacDougall notes, conversation— as opposed to dialogue— does not involve the exchange of prior information; instead, it creates the circumstances in which new knowledge may take us by surprise[26].

Our primary objective in starting the seminar series in this way was to effect a break with the familiar and established patterns of thinking about ethnographic work. By combining clear work tools, tasks and technologies as techniques, that is as skilled, embodied practices, we confronted the problem of how to bring about a fundamental re-orientisation in the perspective of the students such that they could think of the research process as not concerning the mastery of abstract knowledge about children or about the city or about anthropological method (as conventionally established by the course reading list).

Instead we sought to locate enquiry within their own subjective experiences of being in the world. Crucial to such a transition was the experience of what Anna Laerke calls 're-membering'[26]. Students were encouraged to access their own memories of childhood as the point of departure for their contemporary explorations. This was not as straightforward as it might first appear. It necessitated a complete re-alignment of the researcher's body as the preliminary to a different kind of engagement— cognitive, perceptual, emotional, sensory—with the world under investigation.

We devised an imaginative writing exercise as the means by which such a transformation in approach might be achieved. Students were required to take up different positions within Manchester; and from these places, they were asked to write a short account of their observations as if they were a child. Not surprisingly, there was considerable scepticism and uncertainty in advance of the exercise; but the readjustment demanded (for example, crouching close to the pavement) proved to be remarkably successful in focusing differently the attention of students on a child's experience of the city. Moreover, the struggle to convey these sensory and bodily impressions through the medium of writing raised two other critical issues in the research process. First of all, students became aware of the non-linguistic understandings of the world which might be more effectively investigated and expressed by techniques other than writing. Second, in trying to use writing as a mediating tool between experience and knowledge there was an acknowledgement of the literary devices selected to shape ethnographic material in different ways. Students confronted within their own work the uneasy tension between imagination and description, speculation and analysis which marks all ethnographic writing.

Tapping into a Malinowskian approach to ethnographic
understanding through the self-conscious re-embodyment of the fieldwork enterprise also had an important influence on the orientation of students toward other research tools and technologies. This
subsequent use of a camera or a tape recorder, for example, was
shaped by its mediation through the body of the researcher; and this,
in turn, created a different kind of relationship between the
ethnographer, subjects and contexts.

Tasks and sociability
Although the model of fieldwork practice which we took from
Malinowski with its emphasis on personal embodied experience as
the foundation for ethnographic understanding was at the centre of
the Research Issues course, we modified it in a number of important ways.
Specifically, we fostered an open, reflective approach to method even if
it remained located in individual experience. In addition we sought to
counter the strongly individualistic impulse of Malinowskian
ethnography through the development of collaborative work within
small research teams. Hence students were encouraged to pool their
different interests and skills in pursuit of a multi-perspective approach
to the research process. The juxtaposition of differing media raised a
variety of questions concerning conceptual and epistemological
assumptions at work in ethnographic enquiry. Not least, the difficulties
students encountered working alongside others in the context of the
seminar series was a valuable lesson in altering them to the complexity
of negotiations at the heart of fieldwork-based research.

From the initial scattering of ideas across the blackboard, there
followed a process of sorting and ordering which led students to form
four-research teams on the basis of loosely shared interests. The first
of ethnographic investigation were—The Learning Environment,
Survival in the City, Paying in Harle, Exploring Adult Worlds. Each
these raised different questions about appropriate methodologies and
the organisation of tasks. Teams were encouraged to experiment with
various tools and technologies as an integral part of the research
process and to explore the process of mediation by which

Notes
1 For a discussion of Colin Ward's The Child in the City, see Harris
below. The interview conducted with Mike Dibb reveals significant
aspects of his approach toward documentary television; see below
pp. 81-90.
2 See Dibb below.
3 For an important critical assessment of the Manchester School, see
Schumacher, L. 1996. 'A Tent with a View: Colonial Officers,
Anthropologists, and the Making of the Field in Northern Rhodesia,
1937-1960.' In O'SULL, 2nd series, II. See also Hansen, U. 1980.
Exploring the City Inquiries toward an Urban Anthropology. Columbia
University Press; and R.P. Wehner 1984. 'The Manchester School in
South-Central Africa.' In An Annual Review in Anthropology. 13.
4 'In particular: 1993. 'Tool-use, sociology and intelligence.' In Gibson,
K.R. and T. Ingold (eds) Tool, Language and Cognition in Human
Evolution. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1995. 'Building,
dwelling, living.' In M. Strathern (ed.) Shifting Continents. London:
Routledge; 1996. 'Culture, perception and cognition.' In J. Howard
Action V: The History and Evolution of Bodily Skills.' In Ecological
Psychology. 4:2.
Manchester: Prickly Pear Press. See also Aich Gupta and James
Ferguson (eds) 1997. Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of
a Field Sense. California: University of California Press; Arika Herle
and Sandra Reau (eds) 1998. Cambridge and the Terra Nova: Contem-
orary Essays on the 1939 Anthropological Expedition. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press.
6 Schaffers, ibid., p.13.
7 Pinsley, C. 1992. 'The Parallel Histories of Anthropology and
Photography.' In E. Edwards (ed.) Anthropology and Photography. Yale
8 Thoroton, R. 1988. 'The Rhetoric of Ethnographic Holism.' In
Cultural Anthropology. 3.
9 Examples include Jackson, M. 1998. Minima Ethnographica.


*See Keywords: pp xxi–xxii.


STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

The summary of work carried out by the different student groups given below indicates the range of approaches which evolved in the course of research. Although each technique was influenced by the conditions and relationships of particular ethnographic contexts, it is important to acknowledge that students were also conscious of working with and against existing meanings embedded in tools and technologies. For example, the camera's conventional role as an agent of surveillance was problematic. Coupled with the contemporary social anxiety surrounding children, students experienced particular difficulties attempting to generate photographic images and video footage. Who would see this kind of material? What control could be exercised over it? What was the nature of consent? For all students, whatever the research strategy involved, it was the complexity of negotiating access and mediating relationships which emerged as perhaps the most striking fieldwork experience.
I. Playing in Holme
Alexia Coppe, Cristina Grasseni, Melanie Liebheit, Marit Meyer

The focus of research was children’s play within a distinctive area of Manchester, Holme. The site has been the focus of much political and bureaucratic attention in the postwar period of development and redevelopment. The team used video, stills photography, interview, informal conversation, children’s drawing and participant observation. Alexia Coppe and Cristina Grasseni produced a 12-minute talking heads video on the relocation of young children and their families. Melanie Liebheit conducted research on safety regulations, construction, and uses of playgrounds in Europe. The juxtaposition of different materials enhanced the sense of how people inhabited place, revealing differences between place itself and how it was described in official reports. For example, Marit Meyer interviewed local politicians and city planners to find out about Holme redevelopment and its provisions for children. She found that despite the rhetoric of inclusion of children in the recent development, they were simply associated with nursery provision, schools and health care. The planners treated children as a separate group with special needs and completely ignored the link between traffic and children’s use of outdoor space. Children were rarely seen by the researchers in outdoor spaces and usually only in the presence of adults. Safety was associated with the intentions of houses and flats, indicating a high degree of fear and anxiety. The visual materials surveyed the particular environmental qualities of Holme—the artificial constructiveness, desolation and the hard, angular nature of urban space.

II. The learning environment
Ruth Hamill, Georgina Himsworth, Aspasia Theodosiou, Sondoss Al-Hassani, Nicole Waller

The interest here was studying children within different kinds of structured learning environments. Ruth Hamill used children’s stories, sound recording and photography to explore ways children thought of the city. She asked children in a school class to choose and write about their favourite place. The stories were performed by the children and recorded for playback at the workshop. The stories were almost all about interiors, rather than about outdoor places in the city. Nicole Waller worked with a small after-school club, using photography and sound recording, provoking some interesting observations on their relationship (see Waller’s essay below). Other members of the research team, Georgina Himsworth and Aspasia Theodosiou, carried out interview based fieldwork combined with participant observation. Their interest lay in children’s ideas of danger in the city. Sondoss Al-Hassani focused on the relationships between children of different ethnic backgrounds within a school’s playground. She found much greater ethnic integration than gender integration.

III. Survival in the city
Caroline Alward, Lorna Kirk, Anna Mehta, Basie Morris

The research focused on the invisibility of children in the city—children in danger, missing, outside normal social structures. The hidden parts of the streets were the field site. The students encountered problems of confidentiality and reciprocity in their projects; and two of them could not convince a children’s support group to give them access to information or subjects. Lorna Kirk recorded the life history of a man who as a child was addicted to drugs. His recollections were complemented by his poetry, reflecting his life experiences and his reflections upon them. Caroline Alward and Basie Morris used visual technologies to try and make present those defined as absent. Morris took photographs of posters of missing children and transcribed some of their stories from the police and the Big Issue. For the workshop, she created a montage of photographs and text that expressed the anonymity of the city and the sense of children inhabiting the cracks. Alward used a video camera to explore different ways in which girls and boys explored the city. Girls were much more bold and ready for adventure.
IV. Exploring adult worlds
Matthew Burnett, Meg Pickard, Christina Sauer, Nikolai Zhoukov

How do children appropriate adult worlds for themselves? How are children placed within adult spaces? How do adults create notions of the child? A number of different areas were used for the exploration of children's processes—the supermarket, the museum, the city as a site of sensory experiences. Nikolai Zhoukov extended this interest with a consideration of how adults construct children as separate beings with distinct needs (special toys, foods, clothes). Meg Pickard presented an internet-based artists-media project which tried to evoke the sensory experience of the child, finding that children responded very differently depending on their locations in the city. Using participant observation and photography, Christina Sauer discovered how supermarkets cynically exploited the child as a consumer.

The research findings presented at the workshop by the four student teams revealed a very different kind of relationship between children and the city from that suggested by Ward in his 1960s work. Today, as thirty years ago the importance of children to the regeneration of urban space is still not acknowledged. But a number of new features have also emerged. There has been a tremendous rise in the levels of fear in the city and much of this concerns around children. Children seem to be guarded by their parents as never before. The spaces they are allowed to inhabit are different and are carefully demarcated. For example, children remain an important presence in the city as consumers and yet they are contained in various ways (for example, literally in supermarket trolleys, as Christina Sauer's photographs revealed). Outside the shopping centres of the city, children are very rarely found—and almost never without the presence of an adult. Play spaces are usually empty and areas that children might once have made their own play spaces are deserted. The ingenuity of the child that Ward celebrated now finds its outlet indoors and under the supervision of parents. Parents are afraid for their children in the streets. Children
REACH OUT: RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Nicole Walker

At the outset, our group’s objective was to explore both the formal and informal aspects of the child’s learning experience. Though united in this aim, each person embarked on an individual project, exploiting both structured and unstructured environments. My interests led me to investigate a local volunteer after-school programme entitled Reach Out. Reach Out was in its fourth year of operation at the time of the research. Initiated by a group of Manchester University students, it involved a weekly meeting between kids ranging in ages 8 to 14 and several students.

The weekly two-hour tutorial and activity sessions took place at either a youth centre or school. Participation was voluntary for both kids and students, the only requirement for the students being a determined commitment to attend.

The first hour of each session involved a tutorial which might include exercises on a wide range of topics, often maths, spelling or science projects. A ratio of one student for every three kids was sought and an attempt was made to pair the kids with the same student each week. The last hour had a much more relaxed structure, a time during which both students and kids implemented an activity either discussed in tutorial—such as small-scale science experiments—or suggested by the kids themselves (e.g. lip-sync or ball games).

Although the programme had many project sites throughout the city—often in less-privileged areas and schools—I chose to attend three sessions with the group at Medlock Primary, a school not far from the city centre. The kids would gather after school, in a fairly open leisure area for the fun activities, but desks were often sought in the adjoining classrooms for the tutorials.

I chose to record and ultimately display these sessions with the use of black and white photography accompanied by atmospheric sound recordings. I decided on the still medium for various reasons. In an earlier course exercise, we, the researchers, were encouraged to explore a public space as a child might. Simple enough, I thought, for all
would require would be exactly that—a simplification of observations and a heightening of the senses. This exercise, however, proved very
difficult. Each time I sat down to write out my observations, I was
convinced the adult in me was projecting onto the paper the popular
notions of what a child's observations should be. The more I tried to
write like a child, the more I found myself slipping into recognisable
stereotypes.

Hence my desire to avoid written observations and to explore a
space, in particular a child's space, with a medium more visual than
literary. A stills, rather than video, camera was utilized, in part as a
personal challenge to revert back to describing a place or experience
through captured spasmodic, instantaneous moments, thus forcing me
to be descriptive in recording scenes rather than allowing a rolling camera
to wander.

My first session involved the introduction of me and my camera to
the kids, students and Head Teacher of the school. Least suspicious of
my intentions were the children, happy to receive the amazement of a
camera—not once did a child request to see the product. The kids
immediately inquired about my presence, yet seemed satisfied with the
answer I was just a student working on a school project. They were
more interested in why I listed taking photos and whether photography
was what I wanted to do for a living. The Head Teacher, however, was
much more concerned with the intended use of the pictures and sound-
recordings.

The children quickly became accustomed to my presence as, due to the
type of recording device, I was forced to move in and around each group,
using a wide-angle lens. The sound recording device was very fixed,
however, left to the side of each group, alternating groups only once or
twice during the final two sessions. The kids were often more animated
when they realised I was taking their picture, yet within only three
sessions, I noticed a definite degree of relaxation due to my high visibility
and continual presence.

The photos resulting from the latter hour, the time when the kids
received more freedom to play and express themselves, were often the
more interesting and visually telling of the story or to take. With
much action occurring all around me as the tutorial groups merged
into one noisy, excited mass of kids, there was much that my camera
did not capture. What it did, however, often revealed anxious and
happy expressions on the faces—looks of laughter and wonder I
would have had difficulty describing. I was always unsure of the
success of the photos until they were developed and in my hand. It was
often easier to plan the shots during the calm moments of tutorials, but
the moments of sheer enjoyment and excited expressions were often
the back of the shutter.

These moments of uncertainty on the part of the recorder and
observer were the ones I measured the most. In a project which
involved my own experimentation with the medium and a challenge to
reveal a part of a world I struggled to describe in words, this was the
moment of personal fulfillment. My resulting video montage of
successive photographs accompanied by basic, recorded atmospheric
sounds of the kids in tutorial and in free-activity time, is, I feel far
from a comprehensive, complete study of the Reach Out programme in
progress at Medlock Primary. Yet this was not my intention. Rather I
discovered how difficult it was, as an adult, to slip into a world I was
once part of. I found myself self-conscious and socially aware of the
incredible gap between myself and these children from very different
backgrounds. I noticed and recalled many similarities in ‘childish’
behaviour, but my own attitude had changed, my own eyes and mind had
adjusted for adult interpretation and reasoning.
The children did not easily accept my explanation for why I had to leave after having just met and made friends. Why couldn’t I continue to come? I found it difficult to pacify these children as I might adults by using the simple statement ‘I’m just too busy’. A bridge I had thought easily traversed both ways had proven to be full of mental traffic on the return. There was no easy escape from these clever kids; as much as I felt I had blended in, there was still a gap they wanted me to justify when I left. By using non-literary methods of research I had also hoped to convey the results in a way less distracted by my adult stereotypes. I felt my presentation of successive stills accompanied by atmospheric sound brought out aspects of the interactions not easily described in words. Through the use of image and sound I was able to capture and transfer moments I believed to reveal unmasked, free expressions of concern, confusion, amusement and enjoyment. Children behaving as children.

Upon the conclusion of our projects, the group re-gathered to compare results. We had discovered a child’s learning environment includes all that surrounds, not merely the structured classroom. We had also discovered that as adults, we too are continually learning. In this instance we learnt not to pre-judge those we assume we already know simply because we too were once that age.

PLAYING IN HULME
Cristina Grasseni

The focus of this research was the use of space for children and by children in Hulme, from the points of view of city planning, play sites and the environmental change caused by a recent redevelopment programme in that area.

We were struck by Colin Ward’s book, especially the chapter on how the child sees the city, stressing children’s capacity for vivid sensory experience, and their capacity to build mental maps of the city: any reader searching among his early recollections will recall how his own perception of his physical surroundings expanded from the floor, walls and furniture of the room in the house or apartment in which he grew up, its links with other rooms, the steps, stairs, yard, garden, front door, street, shops and public park.12

Our key questions were: how do children perceive their living and
playing environment in Hulme? How did the planning of Hulme redevelopment take the children's needs into consideration? Our research and our use of technologies were interview with video-recording, participant observation, still photography, and sound recording. The ethical issues we faced were: keeping an objective, neutral point of view when confronting the dwellers and the planners' points of view, where we are expected to be in conflict with each other; giving a fair representation of an area already controversial for its degradations; giving feedback to the children approached.

Ideal homes
Hulme has been a working class area since the 19th century. Its slums were cleared in a late 50s redeveloped and substituted with concrete crescents and tower blocks. There became progressively notorious as an example of bad public housing, with lack of maintenance and high crime rates. In 1991 and Hulme City Challenge declared Hulme a Clearance Area. The Crescents were knocked down and lower terraced houses were built, restructuring the road layout as well.

Homes for Change is a housing co-op. At the time of shooting Ideal Homes, the film which Alex Coppe and I made as part of the research project, the housing co-op premises stood out in the Hulme landscape as an isolated yellow building, surrounded by wasteland. Some of the people we met there used to live in the Hulme Crescents. In fact, some of the mothers of the children we filmed used to be dwellers, and they mentioned how they felt that Homes for Change may be looked down on, because of its 'alternative' tenants. Despite the fact that the design and facilities of the co-op had been agreed upon in tenants' meetings, one of the mothers complained that the building was dangerous for children, and that some of the facilities provided (such as a basement daycare) were not being used. The general feeling of the interview was that of a community not yet replaced by another, and an underlying sense of having been 'directed' from above.

The intellectual context in which we developed Ideal Homes was our training in visual anthropology at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology. Ideal Homes was conceived as an exercise in the 'talking heads' genre. To this end, we were supposed to play out interviews and filming in a predetermined and static set-up in which, typically, one or more interviewees receive and answer questions. This involves mainly two sets of skills: the interviewer should prompt the right kind of answers by asking the right kind of questions; the film crew should arrange subjects, context and lights according to the standards that determine a certain visual style. In our case, we asked ourselves how to gear these skills to children: how could we bond the constraints of the 'talking heads' convention to elicit the children's recollection of their lost living space and their perception of their actual homes? We wished to find a way of interviewing children on video that could elicit their sense of place: paths and boundaries, with hiding places and other special places for particular things? In fact, we wished to bend the visual and linguistic standards of the talking heads mode to the needs of ethnographic enquiry. So we decided to leave the interview very open, to allow children and mothers to sit or get up, to come and go freely. This made the scene very variable at one point we would have only two of the mothers present, at another three mothers with up to five children running in and out of shot, bumping on the wooden floor and occasionally into the microphone itself.

The children we interviewed ranged in age from 4 to 8. We used photographs of the old Hulme, provided by the mothers, to prompt recollections of their life in the old community. The following extracts are from conversations recorded for our film:

I (age 4) - Look at me in an old... That's me driving the car! And that's the end of it. So, and that's when they knocked it all down, the big crap. They're knocking it down now!

Z (age 6) - D'you know what? Around back there, I could climb up a tree and then jump off!

S (age 27) - We had a natural community, there were places where we could meet, big open spaces like that great big car park where we could have parties, and it was all legitimate, no hassle with the
The point of our photographic elicitation was to try not to impose our own questions and language and instead be a sense of the lived experience of the kids emerging from images and vivid recollections of a past environment. The children remembered the lived environment of their games and mates.

When shown a picture of the Crescents, first celebrated as monuments of modern life, then demolished as an architectural and social failure, they mentioned a tree behind them, from which they used to jump. Still today, though, the interview with the mothers highlighted a task in urban Halme, of unplanted natural spaces and resources to be appropriated again by a community and its children. One of these was a bike ramp built by one of the tenants at the back of Homes for Change with free access for everyone. Once they get a means of transport such as a bike and are grown up enough, kids move around freely in the city, using BMX ramps, or skateboarding. The ramp at the back of Homes for Change was a meeting point for kids of diverse age groups, from very young children to teenagers displaying their acrobatic skills. For the mothers of Homes for Change, the ramp was an informal neighbourhood play site, with easier and safer access than Halme Playing Ground, which lies on the other side of a major traffic route. Moreover, it was a place on which they could constantly keep an eye on the younger children while leaving them free to play and socialize. Halme being notorious for small-scale violence, the mothers in Homes for Change monitored the comings and goings of kids on the premises and some complained of occasional ‘rivalry’ by outside kids and instances of bullying against the youngest. One year on, the ramp had been taken down to make space for the next development phase.
K. (age 26) - There's nothing here for kids to do, that ramp is very unique, and if it won't last, it'll be lucky if it sees another summer.

G. (age 30) - I have this hope that when G. gets to about 10 we won't stay in this country, 'cause I don't like the thought of him growing up in the city, having to deal with the pressures of being a young kid. It's that time gap, unless they have an ambition at a young age, they just follow what everybody else is doing.

P. (age 14) - If you've got a BMX and you need BMXing you come here and you can practice; you don't have to pay, so it's alright. It's not exactly a dream, though. I've got better things to do than this. I want to go to college and do mechanics, car mechanics and stuff like welding, that's what I'm interested in.
Our filming session became more centred on the children’s own drawings. We asked them to draw their homes and to give descriptions of them and their surroundings. This request was dictated by an interest in eliciting and interpreting the children’s own visual productions. This interest derived in turn from an overall concern with ‘how people see the world’, or with vision and the perception of the environment.’ Initially, inspired by Colin Ware’s book, we thought of videoing and reconstructing the children’s routes to school. But we found that the mothers tend to take the kids to school in the car, especially in the middle of winter.

When prompted to map the spaces that pertain to them, they all turned to the interior of their homes. They all drew the building from the outside, with trees and major landmarks (such as the Holme Bridge), but in their explanations they concentrated on the interior geography of their living space: the bedroom, the toilet, their own ‘secret room’. Though appearing visually abstract, the descriptions were realistic and imaginative, stressing some of the features in the building: “that’s all the windows, and that’s all the lights that keep it nice and clean, and that’s all the big people standing out of their windows, and some are asleep, still in bed, and that’s the Holme Bridge, and that’s all the stairs” [1, age 6]. I probably locate the Holme Bridge as part of the landscape of Holme for Change, as it is only separated from his home by flat wasteland. The monumental bridge possibly looms large in his imagination from the daily car trips to school, since it is very visible and a point of orientation from this side of Holme.

We noticed this, when drawing and talking about their homes, the children displayed imagination, optimism and almost impermeability to the fact that their previous living space had been knocked down under their eyes, and to the fact of living in an area which is notorious for small-scale violence. One of the children presented us with ‘a castle and two trees’, and only after arguing with the others (‘you don’t live in a castle?’) he agreed that in fact ‘it’s not a castle, it’s flat’. The homes of the older children looked typical: a square house with a door, windows and roof; and trees next to the building even where no tree is actually to be seen around.

Conclusion
In our interpretations of the children’s drawings we tried not to impose clichés or an adult gaze, but rather see with new eyes an environment of which we had—as adults and as students living in Manchester—
stereotypical expectations. In this we were also influenced by a 1998 exhibition of Salford schoolchildren, 'Through the eyes of a child', which made use of diverse materials and techniques in allowing children from Salford to draw their own lived environment. For instance, we noticed that one of the children explained his use of the colour yellow to draw 'Homes for Change, not because it is actually a yellow building, but "because yellow is a bright colour and I like it". Our exercise highlighted free and personal association of lived experience, mental maps and visual productions. This also served the purpose of stepping beyond the standards of strictly observational codes of practice. Intervention and elicitation were used, in interview and during the drawing session. The intertwined elements emerging from this session were the environmental and social history of huttes, the age gap and the diverse worldviews of parents and children, the power of imagination and symbolism of the children's images and recollections. A certain amount of structuring and intervention served the purpose of trying to let some emerge spontaneously from a complex situation.

One must bear in mind that this project was conceived as an exercise in filming an interview and a brief attempt at ethnographic observation of children. The final product has certainly been constrained by the time limitations of our participant observation, but it has hopefully explored innovative ways of doing participant research with children and of bending cinematic styles and practices to the purposes of anthropological fieldwork.

Notes
4 ibid., p. 23.
5 This is the topic I am currently working on for my Ph.D. dissertation on the lived experience of dairy farmers in a mountain community in the Italian Alps.


REFLECTIONS ON THE COURSE
Melanie Lieblit

As one of the students taking part in the Research Issues seminar, I will analyse my personal experiences of conducting research about and with children within the scope of the course. I was confronted with one central issue: the question of how I was going to approach working with children. Through an illustration of this issue I will look at the process of my research. Coincidentally, I will reflect on how the seminar series inspired me in my specific approach.

At the beginning of the course we were asked to focus on one particular aspect of Colin Ward’s book The Child in the City. I was stimulated by the parts in which Colin Ward discusses children's adaptation of their environment for playing. He argues that children 'will play everywhere and with anything' and shows how children in the city incorporate objects in their environment into their play and inventiveness.
games around them. An example of this is his description of children in New York adapting fire hydrants for different water games. It was especially intriguing to me to read Colin Ward's book that triggered my memory of my own childhood (although I was not a city child) and probably for this reason arouses my interest. I remember that as a child I loved playing on the streets and in the fields which surrounded our house, but I never recall being in the playgrounds. Correspondingly, on the basis of my personal experiences as a child and my interests, I developed my research objectives. I planned to study if and how children use the one hand playgrounds and, on the other hand, other open public spaces such as the street or wasteland and adapt them for their play. My aim was to gain a child's perspective of the environment with respect to playing. In the course of my research, however, I realized that I had to modify my research topic. Since, contrary to my expectations, I encountered children mainly in playgrounds and hardly in any other outdoor environment, my research became 'only' about children's use of playgrounds. In contrast to this, I was interested in how adults, who plan and design play areas for children; conceptualise children's play and accordingly define where and how to construct places for play. I did not intend to discuss the latter aspect of my research objectives any further. I just wanted to mention that I conducted two interviews, one with an employee of the National Playing Fields Association and the other with a playground equipment manufacturer and chairman of the European committee for playground safety norms.

Even though everyone in the Seminar was encouraged to take her/his personal experience as a starting point for developing a research topic, the Seminar was intended as a collaborative group project. My group shared a common interest in children in relation to open public space. We decided to approach the topic from different perspectives to arrive at a comprehensive study. We wanted to examine the way in which children are taken into consideration in city planning, as well as the more general criteria for constructing places for children in the city. We were also interested in how children use and perceive their playing environment. We agree to concentrate on Hulme, a specific area in Manchester. We were concerned to know how children had been considered in the area's redevelopment, employing participant observation, video, photography and interviews (see Geasman's contribution).

Even though we rarely worked as a team after we had co-ordinated our respective research objectives, we did occasionally discuss our experiences and research. Since within our group the research topic was well-defined and every member of my research team was looking at the same area, these discussions were inspiring and helpful as they led to insights into our topic from different points of view. As I mentioned earlier, I basically saw any children playing in the streets; through our group discussions I learned that in some cases it was the parents who did not let their children play in the streets as they thought that the area was too dangerous. This framework challenged me to make my observations more substantial, as well as making me more reflective about the research process.

When I started my fieldwork in March, an earlier exercise from the course proved to be helpful in preparing myself for fieldwork. We were asked to observe a particular place in Manchester - in my case Withrow Road - from a child's point of view. While I was observing and walking down Withrow Road, I paid particular attention to the things which were close to the ground and I tried to remember what it was like to walk down a busy street with shops, restaurants and a lot of traffic when I was a child. I realized that a lot of things, which I had not seen before with my adult eyes, may have importance for children's perception of the environment: for example, chunks in a fence to peer through or different objects to climb on or jump over. Regarding this experience, I decided to approach my field in a similar way. Thus, I started off my fieldwork with observation in the area of Hulme. I tried to view Hulme from a child's point of view and pay attention to things which might be striking for a child. I believe that this imaginative approach, based on my own experiences of my childhood, helped me to develop an empathy with the children I encountered and their behaviour which I believe was decisive for coming close to a child's perspective and which facilitated my interaction with them later on.
I am aware of the fact, however, that it is impossible to fully adopt a child's perspective, just because I have lived through childhood myself. The world the children live in today differs from the one I lived in as a child and the environment of Hulme is very different from the environment I grew up in. There is a risk of reading children's behaviour through an egocentric frame of reference, that is, my intimacy of my own childhood. Apart from this, I agree with Fine and Sandstrom when they point out that we are always "constrained by our 'subadult-centric' nature of our understanding". While I was engaged in informal conversations with the children in the playgrounds, for example, I realised that one easily falls into the trap of asking questions which an adult might think are of interest to a child. Questions such as where they liked to play the most or which equipment in the playground they favoured were often not relevant to the children. As a result they quickly lost interest in this kind of conversation. They gave me a monosyllabic response and ran off to come back later again. I learned that instead of direct questioning, it was more promising to see what the children were doing and how they were interacting. These sorts of conversations shed light on aspects which I had not considered before. In one instance, for example, through talking to a four-year-old boy, I became aware of the fact that bullying might restrict younger children in using the playground. During my research, I did not merely want to observe and talk with children, however, I also wanted to participate in their activities. On one occasion, a six-year-old girl asked me if I wanted to play with them and I agreed to play catch with them. Through my participation and my specific role, I arrived at an understanding of their play by experiencing and practising it myself. The experience of participant observation was not only interesting in respect to the kind of data it fostered, it was also crucial in regard to my aim of coming close to a child's perspective, which is, as I mentioned earlier, closely related to empathy and imagination.

In the Seminar series we were encouraged to employ a range of different techniques and technologies to test the research potential of different means of research. In addition to the methods I outlined above, I chose to use photography to capture the interaction between
children while playing and the expressions of their faces while they engaged in play. I believe that visual media can provide and impart knowledge that is difficult to achieve through a written text (see Walker’s article). Apart from this, I wanted to try and test photography as a medium for collecting ethnographic data. The employment of photography made me conscious of the ethical problems involved in utilising visual means as a method of recording, especially in respect to children. I believe it to be imperative to obtain the consent of the people being photographed and, in the case of children, their parents as well. It turned out that many parents were suspicious of me when I asked them whether they would mind if I took photos of their children. They were concerned about a possible misuse. On one occasion, when there were no adults around, nevertheless I decided to take photographs. After a while a mother came up to me and asked angrily what I was doing. Even though I explained to her that I was conducting research for a university project and assured her that I would not publish the pictures, she still did not want me to take photographs. These experiences made me more aware of ethical issues in fieldwork.

Another ethical problem in my research with children was my perceived position as an authoritative adult woman. I found in some situations I was almost obliged to abandon the researcher role and resolve a conflict between children. In one case a four-year-old boy came up to me complaining about another child and asking me to intervene in a disagreement. In another case, an older boy passed by the playground and I was told by a child that he had to come to hear them up. Although in neither case the situation escalated, it points towards the question of adult intervention or even interference.

Within my research about and with children, one central and interesting feature was the distinct character of the relation between me as the researcher and the children as the ethnographic ‘Others’. The fact that I have lived through a childhood myself led to a sense of empathy with the children. However, as I outlined above, the children were in the end just as foreign to me as any other stranger. Resulting from this, I developed my specific approach, whereby I worked imaginatively and gave strong emphasis to the development of empathy with children. Simultaneously, my research was very much inspired by the material itself, that is, what the children were doing and saying. In this respect, the seminar series allowed me to interrogate what it meant to be a child in Manchester in six innovative ways. First, I was part of a group and had to contribute my own perspective as part of a larger project. Second, I was able to develop the perspective by interrogating my own assumptions in conjunction with others, thus finding my own ‘voice’ through the material.

Notes
2 ibid., pp. 77-78.
THE CHILD IN ANTHROPOLOGY!

Mark Harris

The Research Issues course took as its point of departure Colin Ward's book, *The Child in the City*. Ward's central concern is the relationship between children and the urban environment; his investigations, wide-ranging and provocative, are an important example of intellectual endeavour unhindered by the disciplinary organisation of knowledge characteristic of academic discourse. The book combines sociological detachment with personal commitment, critical insight with unpunished argument. Its author seeks to articulate a radical agenda about the socialisation and demystification of cities. Children are critical to this objective.

During most of the century, children have been excluded, deemed invisible or defined as a problem by those responsible for the planning and development of Britain's cities. Ward, however, celebrates the resourcefulness of children in resisting the indifference, indeed often downright hostility of bureaucracy to their needs. He consistently uncovers the different ways in which children themselves use the city as a 'school without walls'; it is upon the successful harnessing of these energies and imaginative resources that the regeneration of urban space depends.

Readers must have had the experience of watching television documentaries exposing some social evil, and of contrasting the solemn words of the social problems industry with the evidence of the cameraman. Although we read about the deprivations of the city child, we see through the eyes of the photographers how children continue every last inch of the left-over urban space for their own purposes, how imaginatively they seize every opportunity for pleasure. The words spell deprivation but the pictures spell joy.

The experiences of children living in cities are, of course, highly diverse. Ward acknowledges the influence of structural factors such as class, gender and race in determining whether a child lives in the 'dullness of deadsville' or encounters the dangers of a broken-down inner city neighbourhood. For, if the dullness of deadsville (typically the smaller city) offers only containment, protection and security for middle class children by restricting them in a 'sandbox city' where they can play as much as they like but they have no freedom, the inner city child enjoys greater scope for adventure but only of the kind that poverty and social isolation permit.

Critical to Ward's interest in the lives which children make for themselves within an urban context is the question of democracy and political participation. It is his belief that the city offers a unique form of education for children, deriving from the ways that people dwell in a place and modify it for their own development and needs. Ward's commitment to environmental education is founded upon a recognition of the active engagement between people and the world in which they live, one which begins with childhood and continues into old age. Education is not about going to school, it is about how a person lives with others in the context of a larger environment. Hence, while arguing for the importance of creating conditions in which such encounters may be sustained, Ward is also mindful of the consequences for a broader political process. For the child to understand his or her
status as a citizen, and to be socially acknowledged as such, is critical in fostering a full participation in social and political life.

The Child in the City, published in 1978, competed photographs (mainly by Ann Golien) and text. Although the images were dropped from the later edition, the text itself remained importantly shaped by photographic form.1 Ward’s exploration of the relationship between children and the city is pursued through a series of meditations around his central theme. The text is not structured as a linear argument. Instead it is ‘open’, the rich texture of his enquiry evolved through a layering of detail combined with observations drawn from sources which include psychology, anthropology, sociology, education, and political science. The dynamic of the text is generated through a juxtaposition of different perspectives, with its various chapters organised according to the principle of montage. If the formal organisation of the book is not often found within academic anthropology, Ward’s method is recognisably ethnographic. The observations offered in The Child in the City are not, as he states in the preface, the product of interviews, rather they emerge from the observation of experienced reality, what children actually do. Empathy lies at the core of Ward’s approach.

The Anthropology of childhood

It is not difficult to identify points of connection between the interests pursued by Colin Ward and areas of research within contemporary anthropology. It is salutary to discover, however, that many of the questions Ward poses in The Child in the City, and the particular perspective he articulates toward childhood, education and environment, anticipate work within the academic discipline by almost two decades. For until recently scant attention was paid to children in anthropological work (Margaret Mead and Esther Goody are important exceptions). One reason for their neglect was the preponderance of conventional theories of socialisation. Children were seen as being out of society and history until they were properly socialised. Such a perception was linked to the disciplinarily marked Durkheimian orientation which inhibited the development of approaches predicated

upon what Ingold has called a ‘dwelling perspective’ (being in the world as opposed to the individual confronting a world ‘out there’). It was the break-up of certain ways of thinking (in particular the

subversion of deeply-rooted binary categories such as nature/culture, individual/society, doing/thinking) that created the intellectual conditions for a new anthropological interest in children.

Over the last decade children have begun to be restored to the social worlds with which ethnographers engage. For example, Allison James’s research both brings the child back into view and exposes the shifting cultural constructions which surround the state of childhood.2 Specifi-

ically, she is interested in what it means to be a child and how children’s understanding of their place in the world affects their own sense of themselves (see James 1995). Other anthropologists, such as Tim Ingold and Christina Toren, have suggested that the work of the child, or any human being for that matter, in society, is never complete. According to Toren ‘living and knowing are the same thing’ while Ingold, in repudiating the cognitive paradigm, argues that children, like adults, are not information processors.3 Children’s learning consists not of information but the acquisition of knowledge in the form of skills, where every human being is a centre of awareness in a field of practice. Following James Gibson, Ingold suggests that children learn through ‘an education of attention’, that is by ‘a fine-tuning or sensitisation of the entire perceptual system’4.

The interest in childhood represents an important extension of anthropologist’s field of enquiry. For taking seriously the perspective of children opens up the contemporary world in new ways. But, as the research of those already involved in this area reveals, engaging with children raises conceptual, methodological, ethical and formal issues for the discipline itself. Here the work of Anna Laerke is especially significant. It extends existing anthropological studies of childhood, not least by making central the problems of technique and form. Laerke follows others in resisting disciplinary status for an anthropology of childhood. She develops a critique of ethnographic approaches whose ‘context with the child is an empirical focus on children only, where the analysis disjuncts children from the very
The blurring of boundaries between different kinds of ethnographic materials has resulted in considerable unease within academic anthropology. It involves many of the anxieties which beset the early modern discipline as its leading figures sought to establish a distinctive kind of expertise, what Clifford calls 'ethnographic authority'. But it was an experience that taking Ward's book as the key text, and juxtaposing it with other kinds of material, did not subvert the anthropological purposes of the course. Indeed quite the reverse occurred. It suggested that an even bolder approach toward potential sources might extend contemporary ethnographic work in interesting and unexpected ways. For a sustained engagement with the ideas of *The Child in the City* within the context of student research projects led to the interrogation of many of Ward's assumptions. Students began to raise anthropological questions about the substance, method and form of Ward's text. For example, there was a dissatisfaction with the lack of sustained ethnography. There was concern about the assumption of the universality of childhood. What did empathy involve? What was the status of memory? What were the particular cultural and gendered preconceptions built into Ward's conception of children in cities?

Can you tell of childhood what is no longer known?  

*The Child in the City* was particularly effective in exposing the complexity of the question of the child. Unlike an academic study with its emphasis upon explanation and analysis, the absence of a tight argument organizing Ward's observations created an interesting effect. At a new level, Ward's approach fostered recognition and familiarity (yes, we have all been children) whilst, at another level it provoked scepticism and doubt (what does it mean to say that we have all been children?). The book was deceptively engaging in the manner of its subject matter. For, as students discovered, children were indeed beguiling. They were at once familiar and strange. Increasingly students began to question assumptions of knowledge or empathy built into Ward's approach. Critical was the distinction between memories of childhood and experiences of child-rearing. Having appealed to personal
experience and memory as the starting point for social enquiry, students recognised that the interrogation of such notions was integral to understanding the nature of their encounter with the child.

The development of critical perspectives toward Ward's book served to expose an interesting range of issues within anthropology itself. Thinking about children prompted more general questions. What kinds of experience and knowledge may be generated reflexively within ethnographic work? To what extent do Malinowski ethnographers become children in the field? How does the trope of childhood function as a particular kind of ethnographic insight? How might memories of one's own childhood emerge unexpectedly within ethnographic research and offer insight into contemporary relations? What role does hindsight play more generally within anthropological interpretation?

The emergence of these issues led me to reconsider aspects of my own fieldwork experience. For, although I had no brief to study children nor had any particular interest in conceptions of childhood, I now recognise that visions of the child haunted this experience in an unusual and hitherto unacknowledged way. For example, I spent most of my time during the early weeks of fieldwork in the company of village boys. It was through children that I was introduced to the life of the Amazonian Folk. Of course I did not become a child in that situation; but, in spontaneously aligning myself with children, I adopted a particular kind of fieldwork role. It seemed to offer me a way of dealing with unfamiliar social relations and a way of knowing ethnographic realities (seeing as if for the first time).

This experience is certainly not an unusual one within anthropology. A number of other writers have commented upon the similarities between ethnographers and children (for example, Jean Briggs). It is important to note the irony of this situation, for it involves a curious reversal of roles. The "native" was traditionally considered to be the child, not the anthropologist. The trope of childhood is, however, never far from the surface of modern fieldwork accounts. The sense of innocence, helplessness, linguistic and bodily clumsiness associated with early days of fieldwork are familiar rhetorical devices within etnographic writing. The child then functions as a literary metaphor for the construction of anthropological knowledge. I learned this information in the social context itself as though I were a new human being. But such an assumption is revealing of a particular European notion of the child. It is perhaps the general neglect of children within anthropological writing that has led to many of the cultural assumptions implicit in ethnographic writing to go unchallenged.

Notes

1 This paper was rewritten with the help of Anna Grimshaw.
7 Latke, A. 1998. 'By way of re-membering.' In Anthropology Today. 14, 1, p. 3.
8 Ibid., p. 5, original emphasis.
I shall begin with three short entries from my notebooks written during the early days of fieldwork. The children and the families described are: Murpuri Muslims, originally from Azad Kashmir (Pakistan), now living in the mill town of Keighley, West Yorkshire.

Dramatic personnel: members of the Saleem family who appear in the scenes.

Mr Mohammad Saleem
- Head of the household

Mr Saleem's wife and mother of ten children

Fazrani (aged nineteen)
- Third child, eldest daughter living at home

Sahana (aged twelve)
- Fifth child, aunties to Sajat

Sofia (aged one and a half)
- Youngest child and Miriam

Sajat (aged one and a half)
- Son to Fazrani, cousin to Miriam

Scene I.

When I arrive, Miriam is sleeping on the sofa where I usually sit. She has come to stay with her mother in her grandparents' household. Though I protest that it is fine, Saeed moves Miriam so that I can sit down. Sahana has been brushing her little sister Sofia, and Saeed combs her wet hair sitting on a stool by the fire. Saeed and Fazrani go to the kitchen to prepare food for the children and for me. Then Miriam wakes up, kneels on the floor and gives Sofia food from her bowl. It is rice and dahl, a favourite. When they want more, Fazrani fetches it for them. Sajat has been wanting some from my spoon. I was uncertain whether I should be feeding him, as no one else has made a move to give him any. Fazrani says "he has had chapati you know, he gets diarrhoea if he eats too much," She gives him some rice anyway.

Sofia helps herself out of the bowl with her fingers. Fazrani says "she helps herself now." Saeed says "she very cheeky girl, she eat herself." I ask if that is good. They say "yes." "Cheeky" here means forward, behaving in an independent way.

Sajat spoons his food in and then looks his bowl, which covers his entire face. We all laugh. He then wants some of Sofia's, which she feeds him, and then they start feeding each other. Fazrani decides he has had enough, and when he protests at the bowl being taken away, I suggest I fetch some sugarless lollies from the car. They take them eagerly. The paper being only half on his, Sajat tears off the rest and starts sucking happily. Sofia sucks her too, then looks puzzled, takes the lolly out of her mouth, inspects it, and puts it back in. After a bit she removes it again, and we realise the wrapper is still on. We all laugh, Sofia looks at us, then laughs too, and works out how to get the wrapper off - we all watch her, smiling. As Sajat makes a bee line for my bag,
Farrana says "Sajat are from you he likes you better than me!"

Today I have forgotten my watch; so pen, lipstick case, bracelet and eye-lays (the favourite) will have to do. Everything is sucked. Sajat gets cross when I say "No" (give me) for my pen to write notes. He also margs my mug onto a bowl. I nearly intervene. Everyone else takes no notice. I am not sure whether they are expecting me to remove these things from him, or whether they do not mind. I leave it. Then he hits Sofia with a mug. Farrana tells him not to. I ask Farrana if I should take it away. She says "no, it's alright, he won't do it again." He does not. She has not raised her voice or physically restrained him.

Miriam and Sofia play. Miriam is kicking an empty cardboard box. They also start to pile up and hide behind empty boxes. Sofia is cackling, kicking and hurling it back. They are both laughing. The adults chat and take no notice. Occasionally they smile, but do not intervene either to encourage or prevent. No other 'boys' are produced, nor appear to be needed. The girls have created their own game. After a while Miriam tries to leave the room, but she cannot turn the door handle. No one gets up to help her. Sofia is behind her. She turns towards us, eyes huge and staring. We all laugh. She tries a bit longer and then gives up. She goes to Sujaw, then to me and starts playing near the door. After a while Mr Salem goes out and he inadvertently opens the door onto her head. He does not notice and she does not cry. She follows him out.

Scene 3.

The children keep to sort and pack greeting cards at certain busy times of the year. These are delivered in a van from the local factory in boxes, often at short notice. The men bring in the boxes and stack them in the hallway or the corner of the main room. A large cloth is laid out to completely cover the floor, shoes are taken off. Different activities are involved. Mr Salem usually does the unpacking. The cards and envelopes are counted in pairs, eight or twelve sometimes counting involves one of each picture or a greeting such as Happy Christmas, Merry Christmas, and Seasons Greetings. Sometimes packs have a variety of each type. They are arranged alternate ways up - at incredible speed. Watching Farrana, I could hardly see the pictures. The packs are then put into cellophane, self-adhesive (little ones often do this), a label put on just so (right hand or left hand corner). The packs are then re-assembled in a certain order (in the boxes e.g., 4 packs per row, 6 rows per layer, all facing the same direction).

If a call comes from the factory in the morning 60,000 cards can be finished by the evening. Anyone who visits will help. The children start sorting when they get back for dinner hour and after school. Kneeling on the cloth, listening to the big ones chatting and laughing, they look happy and content to be helping. No one has asked them to do so. I ask them if they like doing it.
They say "Yes", Sawar says it's boring but a way for Pakistani women to earn money, since working at home does not go against the honour of the family (kinship group). Mr. Saleem, who earns a hundred and twenty pounds a week (to support a family of ten) says it helps financially.

When I began my research, it was with a set of assumptions about childhood and children strongly influenced by my own experience of growing up and bringing up my own children in a Western society. The key characteristic of these assumptions is that children are qualitatively different from adults. This difference is expressed in terms that emphasize the child's physical (biological) needs, for example, in the use of special food and clothes, cars, buggies, specified bedtimes and toys. Ideologically, children are understood to be innately innocent but also in need of discipline and protection. Children are neither expected to contribute economically to the family unit, nor shoulder serious responsibilities. Rather, childhood is seen as a distinctive time for learning, in which children are separated from their families into school in order to be taught specific knowledge and values. Children's development must be fostered—they are compared to growing plants—the maturation of tender shoots nurtured in the nursery.

During my early days of fieldwork with Mirpuris, all of these assumptions were challenged. In Scene 1, for example, Sujat and Sofia ate the same spicy food at the same mealtime as the adults. Special children's food had not been prepared. They sat on the floor or on the low sofas with everyone else and any mess they made was cleaned up at the end of the meal. Bibs and high chairs did not feature here. We also saw that Miriam had fallen asleep and continued to do so, on a sofa in the living room, i.e., she had not been designated a special sleeping place or bedroom, which would effectively have removed her from the communal space. Children, like adults, sleep where and when they need to and whether or not there are other people around. It was also clear that children's development is not 'fostered', but like most adults, is understood to take place by being with people. Thus, except for mosque school, children are not separated out to learn different aspects of their lives. Furthermore, parents do not see the need to provide toys in order for children to learn; although they know from school that toys can be seen as educational. If children want materials to play with, they usually use whatever is around. The empty box that Sujat, Sofia and Miriam enjoyed kicking, was an accidental discovery, rather than an organised 'learning' activity.

These examples would suggest that the physical needs of these children were not separated out as for any distinct set of practices. Nor was there a sense that children needed special discipline and protection, features that I had expected from my own experience and from reading the literature. It seemed that I had to consider the idea that, for these people, childhood was not a meaningful concept in many of the ways that I understood the term. Indeed, a number of aspects of Mirpur life resonated with middle-class life as described by Ariès, when childhood 'did not exist'.

I was then faced with the problem of what I was going to research. My interest was to study Mirpur childhood. Yet, how could I frame my enquiry in terms of a distinctive stage of life that had no meaning for the Mirpur people themselves? To focus on their understanding of 'the child' would have been to make a distinction that Mirpuris themselves did not share. The problem of the dichotomy of child/adult relationship is that it is "derived from the adult system of classification, and it is only because the distinctive extra within the terminology adopted by adults, that the category 'child' can be seen as a subject worthy of study".² In order to explore the category of 'the child' within this particular culture it would I felt, have to be significant for the people themselves. One solution might have been to write about (or film) Mirpur life in general, so that children could be seen to work, play and mingle freely with adults in the social life of the community. However, to take this approach would have been at the cost of my particular interest in childhood as an analytical concept. Another approach would have been to analyse childhood in terms of what it was 'not'. However, the problems of analysing aspects of culture in terms of 'absences' rather than 'presence' has already been widely noted in the literature.²

²Through childhood as a category did not seem to be significant for
the Mirpuri, I felt that it was impossible to study Mirpuri children as social persons—to make them the focus of my attention.

In the early days of visiting, I told the families that this was my interest and intention and a number of adults said they understood and would help me. I soon realized there was a difficulty in being with the children, not because of the ethical problems of trust and safety (noted by Grimshaw above), but because the adults felt that it might be more appropriate for me to study other aspects of their culture (such as the teachings of Islam). They also made it clear that as a respected visitor I should sit with the 'ladies' and take part in their discussions. It occurred to me that I might ask them for their childhood histories: how was it for them when they were children, what memories stood out for them as important. Nevertheless, the hope for discussions to my prompting—"what did you do when you were a child, what kinds of games did you play, who were your friends?"—was dashed by a few short answers, "I helped my mother cook, I went to Mosque school". After a polite pause, they would turn to a topic of real interest such as whether my mother-in-law beat me. Meanwhile the children ran freely between the rooms, seeking to me respectfully, bringing me tea. Thus, it seemed that they were inadvertently collaborating with the adults in their own exclusion from my study.

With time, the problem of adults creating a barrier to my focusing on children was resolved. As they knew me better, the family's resulting from my frequent visiting enabled me to follow the children when they left the sitting room, without anyone especially noticing. In the kitchen or upstairs, older siblings and young visitors would discuss and gossip about the activities of other members of the family (kindred group). Of particular interest were births and deaths, people coming and going to Pakistan, clothes for weddings and Eid. At these times, Farzana, my main informant, would tell stories from the past and explain the actions of the present. I would listen with the younger children and learn from these exchanges, but they remained shy and polite with me when I tried to talk with them directly. With hindsight, I can see that they were behaving with me in the ways they did with other adult members of the family, certainly, respectfully, but

distanced. It was difficult to continue the rapport that I felt I had established. As well as visiting Mirpur home, I also worked with the children in Westgrove, an English First School. During the early days of fieldwork, it became clear that within the institution of pedagogic practice, there were a number of 'given' of what childhood, knowledge and learning might be. Childhood was understood to be a time when children, being innocently innocent, needed special protection and discipline. They were seen as close to 'nature' and able to learn within and from it. In the teaching practice at Westgrove, discussions past and present (particularly the writings of Rousseau, Piaget, Vygotsky, and the legislation following the influential Plowden Report) underpinned an ideology of child-centered education. This approach to school was seen as a community in which children learn to live "first and foremost as children and not as future adults". It emphasized that children need the right environment to be themselves. Special emphasis is laid on an individual's creativity, discovery and first hand experience.

The contrast of this explicit ideology of childhood with the Mirpuri absence of childhood already described, was striking. How, I wondered, did the Mirpuri children themselves make sense of the practices by which childhood was being created for them?

It has been suggested that children can make sense of school by the adaptation of previous experiences to the new ways of learning and so conforming to expected behaviour. Jean LIVE, for example, suggests that learning always involves the bringing of past experiences to the present situation. The following classroom experience suggests this possibility.

The assignment was to draw a number of objects that correspond to geometric shapes. Faz has drawn a suitcase in order to practice rectangles and she decorates it with brightly coloured flowers inspired by those she has seen on fabrics and wallpaper at home. The suitcase reminds her of a journey to Pakistan and she spontaneously begins to tell me of why she made the suit. Afterwards, with her help, I wrote down what she had told me.
Flyg

My grandfather died and we went to the funeral. I cried a lot. Everyone did. We stayed in my aunt’s house. She has lots of cows and sheep. She couldn’t go with them when they went down the mountain, because she had to feed the cows. It took a long time and the car got stuck. Grandma’s house was big and we sometimes slept on the roof. Grandma had been ill here but he went there [Pakistan] to die. My little sister died at 8 months but is buried here. Don’t write her name, Miss.

Natasha

Is it alright to write “your little sister”?

Flyg

Yes, Miss. Sue got ill. We went to visit her in hospital.

Natasha

What was she ill from?

Flyg

What, Miss?

Natasha

What did she have wrong with her, Fisz?

Flyg

She was filled up with yellow water.

Natasha

Was her skin yellow?

Flyg

No, Miss, but it was hard to see her, she was in a dark room. When she died my mum cried a lot. People came to say goodbye. She was wrapped in a white shroud—you have to wear that Miss—and white clothes and socks.

Natasha

And shoes?

Flyg

No, Miss, you don’t wear shoes. Then we buried her in a box with the lid on. It was earth on top. When it is raining, it gets muddy.

Natasha

When did this happen?

Flyg

In ’93, Miss. My mum had two boys but they were only in the world for 3 days. At the funeral Mahoed [a friend in the class] came and helped us move the furniture upstairs.

Natasha

What do you mean?

Flyg

Well, we take upstairs all the sofas, cupboards, even the fridge and tables so there is room for everyone to sit down.

Natasha

You mean on the floor?

Flyg

Yes, Miss. Lots of people came, a huge crowd.

Evil Fisz (and other children), dying and funerals are an aspect of everyday life at home. Children visit other families that have a bereave-ment and weep and says prayers (mastan) over the body along with the other mourners. I found it interesting that while she described the events surrounding the deaths of her siblings and what this meant to her, she was not overly emotional. This calm manner is consistent with a style of narrative she would have encountered at home. That she talked about an experience so traumatic, in a maths lesson, made her narrative all the more poignant.

It would not have been possible to have interrupted Fisz, to suggest that we returned to the maths lesson, though I knew that that was what the teachers had entrusted me to do. I was quite aware that talking in class was one aspect of discipline which this encounter could be seen to be infringing. Could I have justified this situation (and many others) by claiming that the experience of a child was enhancing a learning assignment? As far as I knew there were no written stories about the process of dying, visiting a dead body, going to a funeral; i.e. the issue of death was unlikely to be explored in the school curriculum. Was child-centredness, therefore, a double-edged concept that referred to particular ways of interacting within certain recognised boundaries? At times, as on this occasion, it seemed problematic to maintain a balance
of responsibility to the staff (not talking in work time) and my friendship with the child who wanted to tell me something important in work time. I felt that child-centredness was an ethos that implied a certain competence in knowing how to be taught (and a visiting anthropologist knowing the rules). However, when I had problems working out (and within) a particular construct of childhood, being with the children in Westgrove did not present the problems that I had experienced in the homes. I could see the other side of child-centredness. Here, with the cooperation of the staff, I was able to move freely between four classes of eight- and nine-year-olds in an open plan unit. I told the children that I was writing about them and the activities that happened in school and they brought me unselected stories, narratives and pieces of information (such as ‘tweets’) that they thought would be important. Sometimes they were keen to write or draw in my notebook, guard it or carry it around for me (see photo). Most of the time, however, it was put out to mean that I could participate in their lessons, games, playtime or meals. My presence in class seemed unproblematic for them. For some children I was a friendly adult to confide in, do a favour for, or borrow things from. I could also help them with their work, though I emphasised that I was not a teacher. It was clear that I had no superior authority or desire to tell them off, and I told them this.

I had to learn the many rules of school life and the children could and did teach me. I should say “no” to a child who asks to go to the toilet in the middle of class for example, was expected by the children and staff. However, this did not mean that the children would not ask to do so. Unwittingly in the early days of fieldwork I would give them the answer to their requests (and tests) and would be told what I should have said or done. My mistakes gave me insights into understandings and rules that for others were self-evident. I could also be aware of the kinds of tricks they played on each other and my obvious satisfaction the first time this happened, though surprising for them, did not spoil their delight in feeling superior.

During the eighteen months of fieldwork, I became close to many of the children in school. I would not claim however, that this closeness was the result of a particular method. In retrospect, I realise that my approach was informed, in part, from ways of working that I had learned at drama school. There, in improvisations we were encouraged to explore our own and each other’s roles in ‘here and now’ scenarios. There was never any certainty of what would be coming next, but in contrast, intuitive reactions to situations, we had to respond in ways that were consistent with the characters we were playing. Working with these children, I often felt I was in a scene that could go in any direction, one that required instinctive responses from moment to moment and which necessitated my taking cues from them while maintaining my own adult part.

I began my fieldwork with the premise that childhood should be seen as a social process, an ‘interpretive frame for contextualisation of the early years of human life’.” If the specific structural components vary cross culturally, I hoped to discover in what ways childhood was meaningful for the Mirpuris with whom I would be working. As well as exploring this adult understanding of the world of the child, I also wanted to observe and talk to the children themselves. This approach assumed that children are social actors worthy of study in their own right, rather than passive agents of socialisation.

My work with Mirpuris raised a number of problems concerning these assumptions. While childhood can be understood to be a social construct in both anthropological and educational discourses, it cannot be taken for granted that it will be meaningful for the children with whom we are working. Furthermore, certain adult agendas can place barriers to other adults researching and being with children. Within educational practices, I found that a particular construction of childhood was created for Mirpuri children, both ideologically and in pedagogical practice. Paradoxically, while it was easier for me to have access to the children within a child-centred ethos, I felt that this construction of childhood effectively separated the children from a full participation in social life (such as they experienced at home). It seemed to me that within the school environment, the children had to come to understand and make sense of the childhood that was created for them.
Notes


2 For example, Ronaldo, R. 1989. Culture and Truth. London: Routledge. It is possible that Mirpuri life would have been better represented in film. The way in which Mirpuri children mingle with adults would have been visually self-evident and would have avoided the negative idea of absence.


6 At times I listened with them to the teaching or instructions of the class teacher. Initially in those situations, the children thought that I should sit on a chair as she did. However, I preferred being with them on the floor where I felt more comfortable. I realised that this was significant for them when one day a boy cried out to his teacher, "Look Miss she's a person too!"

TECHNIQUES OF OBSERVATION

Amanda Rovitz

What does it mean to see the world from another person’s point of view? What is it like when a camera is used as a way of finding out?

These are the questions I began asking a year and a half ago as I used a video camera to do fieldwork on a council estate in a northern English town. My subject matter, I set to realise in the six months I spent there, was not only the worldview of the two young women who became participants in my research, but also my own assumptions and ways of seeing, as revealed through my relationship with the specific tools and methods I had chosen to use.

Bolton is a Pennine town several miles north-east of Manchester with a population of 13,000. It was built on the back of the cotton industry in the nineteenth century, developing rapidly into a mill town and thriving marketplace. But the collapse of the British cotton trade at the beginning of the twentieth century gradually sapped the area of its newfound prosperity and both jobs and population dwindled as, almost too late, the concept of regeneration took hold.

The research I proposed to do there grew out of two closely connected strands of experience in my own life. Trained as an undergraduate in the late seventies and early eighties, I was interested in questions surrounding vision and visually. I wanted to find out about the connections between the different ways people see and the beliefs they hold. In Barfoot these ways of seeing and believing appeared to be closely related to people’s sense of place. More recently I had followed a course in visual anthropology with video. I had found that using a camera around the town gave me insights into things people are surrounded by, their sensory world and the things they see. My plan was to investigate the relationship and draw up through the sustained use of a video camera.

Finding out how people see and what they believe in entails getting close to them, entering their world. One of the ways in which anthropologists have used film to do ethnographic research has been through the development of the observational method. In common with participant observation, the method teaches that using a camera to observe the world whilst participating in it necessitates the presence of a relationship built on trust and respect. Without such respect, observation becomes distant, creating a feeling of separation leading to or arising from objectification—denying a sense of shared humanity and history. Classically in observational cinema, respect has meant presence without interference, speaking only when you are spoken to, observing life in the spirit with which you might uphold a religious observance.

The philosophy behind this method had been helpful in illuminating my former experiences as an artist. The idea that observation can, indeed should, include respect and participation made sense of the ambivalence I had felt years ago in the life drawing room. The usual approach to the model was academic and analytical, reducing the man or woman posed at the front of the class, in the strange electric glow of the industrial heater, to a complex bundle of muscles and bone. But the classes I had enjoyed and the only ones where I had managed to draw well, were run by an artist who had encouraged us to move...
around, to talk, to the model, to think about our surroundings and sense of place, in other words to inhabit the same space as that occupied by the subject we were trying to draw.

It was early in the year when we began to use a video camera and was taught to come in and to develop a strong relationship with the people being filmed, that my reaction to the life classes in all those years ago bears a clear resemblance to the way I observe well when I felt some shared presence with the person I was observing. As if to conduce to this insight, all my exercises using the method, before starting fieldwork in Sarlough, had been with people whom I already knew there, even if only slightly. I had found that, for me, the method worked well.

It was important to me that having set myself up with a year and a half of fieldwork-based entirely on the use of visual technology, I would be trying to find out about situations where not only did I not know pre-planned, but where relating to them and feeling respect for their lives might not be straightforward. How would this affect my feelings about observational participation, the only method I had wanted to use in my work as a video ethographer so far?

In the field

The site I arrived was lunchroom club. The downstairs of the centre—Youth—was an open-plan cafeteria, The floor covered in blue linoleum, the seats, kick boards and table tops in red, all seemed to suck up any light that had struggled through the three mundane wood windows set into the building’s backside. A kitchen bar dissected the width of the room.

Leaping on the counter a young black woman and a white woman in her mid-thirties were laughing.

The younger woman—Tina—speaking over her shoulder, does not look at me "You come for lunch club? I hesitate for a moment, aware of the bulky camera bag on my shoulder.

Sort of. I’m going to be around for a bit, helping."
interest in making a video recording of her own. She spent a lot of time at the center using the advice services available there. There was a Citizen's Advice Bureau outreach worker who came once a week, a family support worker who accompanied Tina to court on different occasions, and access to a washing machine, parent and toddler classes, and a telephone.

I filmed Tina polishing the floor, something she did regularly before lunch club where she often helped because she liked talking to the elderly people who came to it. She had given her permission verbally, but as soon as I began her body said no. She turned away from me and my camera, her face was nervous and unsure. I filmed her with the citizen’s advises worker whom she went to see to try for a transfer from the estate where she was living to the one where the centre was located and where her negotiated lived. I was aware suddenly of the silence in the room, and for the first time being able to hear her conversation properly and record it on tape. I knew that her resistance to me and the camera was reduced here, that I gained from her relative lack of power in the face of the system she was trying to engage.

At the parent and toddler group, where she and Cheryl sat infantualised at the toddlers’ tables with their three-year-olds, messing with paint and glue whilst shouting at the kids, they joked that I was an undercover social worker who had come to gather evidence of their abuse of the children. I countered that on my arrival they had thought I was there to do a community service preferring this memory to their memory of me. But what was it that I was hoping to find out by filming under these uncertain conditions, amongst these ambivalent relations?

Since I had been filming from almost the first day, I did not really know. But by the time, paradoxically, I was aware that it was largely because of the camera that I was allowed to hang around their conversations at all. It was a visible sign of who I was and what I was here to do, despite the warning tones of the jokes. No social worker was ever part of the intimacy of the conversations I came to hear, in particular, when the camera was turned off I was treated as harmless.

Once day someone asked to take the camera outside the building to the low wall where the teenagers skiving off school hung out, and Tina joined round and told me I’d be mad to let them, they’d be off with it in no time. She took it instead, and pocketed the use of it, passing it from hand to hand, keeping all of her attention and threats towards protectiveness engaged with the machine. When they had finished we went upstairs to watch on TV what they’d recorded.

Tina moves the camera within five inches of Sharon’s face, and asks aggressively who the father of her yet-to-be born baby is. Cath turns it on Sho and acces to him of starting a fire in her house. He grabs it and Tina removes it from him, “Don’t think you can run off with this and sell it, Sue!” Cath points it down the block, scanning the most traumatised street on the estate. She notices a car and looks to give a running commentary, “It’s an unmarked police car, and who’s that in it? Oh yeah, it’s Stinkie, fat cunt, the one who came to Cheryl’s door when they caught up with Doug and took Krisy to school before taking her down the nick.”

If control of a camera gave me character and credibility, then my car gave all of us access—me to them and them to cheaper supermarkets, family and friends in other towns. We drove around (I was unable to film much of the time) and as we drove the girls saw things that I had never seen before. The town suddenly seemed to have become a police state. They were everywhere, on duty, off duty, plain clothes. Unmarked CID cars, people just out of prison, people who were looking for other people to give them a beating, to score off, to pay back debts, to kill. And the girls wound down my car windows and yelled at the police and at their friends and cronies, safe in the moving vehicle, insured and chauffeured, visible in a way that being stuck at home without a boyfriend and his stolen car rarely afforded.

It was symptomatic of a daily life based more acutely than mine on a battle of the visible and the invisible. Constantly under surveillance by the police, by security cameras in shops, by social workers, teachers, support workers and now, in part, by me, there was a tension between

Techniques of Observation

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vision as disciplines and vision as substitution. Resistance became a manner of playing with appearance and disappearance, of going on the offensive through sets of invisibility and counter-surveillance.

And still I felt my camera as part of this disciplinary brigade of peering eyes. Pondering daily on how to move things along, I pushed the idea of making a collaborative video, with Tina again and she agreed, suggesting we make it about her daughter. Both Tina and Cheryl had walls full of photos of their children in some cases this was all that was left of children who had been removed from their care. The ten-minute tape we produced, edited with Tina’s and Cheryl’s participation at the University, allowed me to film new situations.

Participation

Concentrating on the children, and with the collaborative idea of making a seventh—something to show the children’s fathers when they came home from prison—gave me a kind of license which I felt until now had been lacking. I had become worried about the police surveillance which now included me. Filming Cheryl leaving my car and walking into the CES office to collect her payment had resulted in a warning phonecall from the police, who had assumed we were setting up the workers there, and we were regularly followed by unsolicited police cars. I worried that the authorities would seize my tapes, that I would end up incriminating the girls in some way that I could not yet foresee.

Both women had had children removed by the courts. Tina’s three-year-old daughter about whom our film was to be made, had been born when Tina herself was only fourteen. Her second child, who had followed soon after, had been taken from Tina care after being found with a broken sackle and was now being adopted by one of her aunts. Tina claimed that the beating had been inflicted by her boyfriend, but no one knew for sure. Grasped up to social services by a former neighbour whom she was now hell bent on punishing, none of her friends dared challenge her, although there were murmurs of her culpability behind her back. On occasions while filming a scene for our joint video, raw emotions broke through the veneer of familiar...
amphetamine, whatever they could lay their hands on. Preparations for the ritual itself were all important. I filled the huddle of girls and young women in the bathroom, saw the skill involved in getting made up, and was struck by the exaggerated carnivalesque characters who emerged. By now it seemed that many of our differences had been accepted, negotiated and stabilised. It was OK that I didn't dress up, make up and take drugs, that I was twenty years older than them and wanted to stay on the right side of the law. I had my job to do with the camera, and over the weekend of partying the chemistry of camera, observation, participation, difference and celebration seemed to work its magic best.

As Tina, Cheryl and the rest chatted openly to each other with the camera on, I knew I had got there at last; that this was the validation of the method I had been pursuing, that my patience had paid off. I was literally and emotionally close up, squeezed into the bathroom, and even later on the street, a location where videoing had begun for a long while impossible and even now was strained, I was for the first time in the middle of the action, following the drug dealing and heroining of the revolving police, the anger and screaming, as if it were the most normal thing in the world to see this, to tape it, and presumably, to take it away.

And then something happened. Nothing dramatic, or outwardly noticeable, just the sense that things had run their course, that, perhaps, that was all I was ready or responsible enough to lay claim to. I think I must have known that I didn't really have enough material to make the seamless, raw, hand-reeling document I played over in my mind, but nevertheless, without doing so consciously, I slowly withdrew. There were things I needed to work out, about my reluctance to record certain scenes I had witnessed, my ambivalence about what it was I owed Tina and Cheryl, about our relationship which had advanced and submitted to a blindness of indifference, difference and division.

Withdrawal

There are many ways, some more academic than others, in which I could now explain what happened, and all of them would be in some form or other true. But the narrative I have struggled to take forward is also one which reaches back to the world of the child whose observational descent I had unwittingly become.

The observational method to which, as a young art student, I was introduced, returning years later as a video maker, echoes for me around a continuum of images, some in paintings, some from films or my own experience, at the heart of which I find my father. He is in his garage naming a piece of wood on a lathe and I am standing, quite close to him, perfectly still, watching the golden wood spinning around its centre, as his hands skillfully manage the chisel. The garage door is thrown open, it is autumn and the leaves which have blown in are crumpled under my feet. My father's attention is upon the wood and mine is wholly upon him.

In the same world, the same father and child produce a different relation of seeing, one which seems to have no resonance with the other scene. He is drunk and shouting, his hand is tattered and though I turn away, I hear him call his arms 'snacks' into my mother. In my mind I see her falling, and in this seeing is a watchfulness born of shame.

There were many scenes I could not film. I felt a child's shame at witnessing them. Things which for other filmmakers might have made the long months of waiting worthwhile. And now that I had withdrawn from the project, how could I hope to work with the material I had gathered, so full of gaps and insecurities did it seem to be. And what did the gaps really mean?

My camera had given me an identity, had become a medium through which to make relationships, had directed my looking, revealing a good deal about Tina's and Cheryl's surroundings, their life under surveillance and their beliefs. I had also learnt about myself and my attachment to the observational method. Part of my vision had been driven by the desire to recover the comfort of any quiet observation of my father working with a welcome degree of predictability at his lathe.

There was an advantage in this for it allowed me to see skill in places where others sometimes missed it—in the drug-created preparations for a Saturday night, or the routine polishing of a shabby linoleum floor. But I
had found the visions unequal to all the ways of being and seeing I had encountered beyond the safe familiarity of worlds encompassing queer and mainstream film. ...

To use a method of research is also to absorb it into an existing mode of consciousness. In the editing room, trying to piece the film together, I had to accept the gaps in my material. And finally it was not the things I had failed to film that mattered. It was more that the vulnerability and shame attached to the witnessing of certain events in my childhood needed to be clarified if I was to use what I did have well and continue using a camera to do research. I had been searching for a way of celebrating skill and motivation in the way we live and eventually I had found it. But now I needed to find ways of using a camera in situations of violence and pain that would be recuperative, neither turning away, nor objectifying with distance, but recognising that we are all part of a struggle to try and change our way of seeing ourselves and each other.

Post script
When I began to write about using a camera to do fieldwork I was surprised by what came out of the process especially those things which are to do with the child and my own childhood. In a way the piece “wrote itself” and I present it here in that form.

One of the problems with a process-based approach, however, is that issues can be missed as without being fully developed. Below I indicate three areas that warrant further reflection.

Children
The relationship between Tina, Cheryl and myself began to change when we worked together, with our daughters, on a video about Tina’s daughter. As Harris remarks in this pamphlet, children and tropes of childhood frequently appear in fieldwork accounts. In my case, children became a very productive ‘site’ of mediation, and this beg the obvious question: why? Why was it acceptable to look at children and not at adults, at least to start with? How was the observation of children circumnavigated by the adults? Gazing with other adults at children playing, was one of the few circumstances in which looking at people and places seemed to lose its sense of surveillance as a negative act.

The interest shown by Cheryl and Tina in making a video with and about children also raises questions about images of childhood and the processes through which they come to be used. It was clear, for example, that Tina saw the video as a way of showing her relatives and finally worker that she was a good mother—as demonstrated by the idealised child she used in the video to present. This was in contrast to her practice, and that of many other young people, on the estate, of refusing a formal separation of social relations into those ‘determined’ by the categories of child and adult, especially of the kind demanded by officials like teachers, social workers and police.

Camera as a tool of objectification
Using a camera helped me to objectify my fieldwork practices, allowing me useful insights. For example filming Tina, Cheryl and the children at parent and toddler classes I found that I was either looking down at them, or else having to squat beside them, as they sat at the small infant school tables. The teacher of the class spent her time in the same way. The effect on the women was one of infantilisation—they took on the embodied practices of small children for the duration of the classes. The theme of being treated like children was one which ran through other aspects of their dealings with ‘providers’. Without the focus on my own movements demanded by a camera, I might well have missed this.

Observational method
By linking the observational method with my childhood, I do not mean to suggest that it is an inherently childlike practice; although the qualities sometimes associated with the method—trueness, transcendence of difference, etc.—have also been attached to tropes of childhood. But clearly such qualities are not unequivocally or universally available
to us, either in childhood or when we pick up a camera and say we are using the observational method.

Understanding more about the links between events in my childhood and my ‘intuitive’ use of a camera has had an interesting effect. My technique is more varied and I have explored more participatory or intersubjective views of the camera. To what extent do our choice of research tools and methodologies reflect histories that are both idiosyncratic and personal, and shared and political—and why should it matter to recognise this?


APPENDIX
A conversation with Mike Dibb, Anna Grimshaw and Mark Harris.

N.B. This is an edited version of the interview that took place in London, December 1998.

MH: What did you find interesting about Colin Ward’s The Child in the City book?

MD: What I like about everything Colin writes is that he looks with an incredibly fresh eye at familiar things, whether it’s architecture or housing or other aspects of social life and always comes up with fresh responses from his anarchist perspective. He also always connects everything he’s seeing and looking at to other people’s perceptions of the same thing. So you get this wonderful sense of both revelation and connectedness. I must be really does seem to me to be one of the best exponents of anarchism as a philosophy.
AG: The thing that strikes me about that book is it's very humanistic, it's people-oriented. Is there something else that appeals to you about Collins?

MD: Very much so. He always checks a theoretical assumption against lived experience and whether he's talking about vandalism or allotments or about children, he listens to other people. It's a very unegoistic way of approaching a subject; at the same time his writing is very personal and held.

MH: So how did you imagine turning the book into a film?

MD: I'd read it a long time ago and it's such a visually-presented book that it obviously could be made into a film but it wasn't a preoccupation of mine at that stage. In a way I was actually thinking that it might be much more interesting for me not to make a film about it, which is why I came to you and your anthropological students. It seemed to me an interesting project for others to do who were located somewhere and who could be stimulated by the ideas in the book and explore some dimension of it in a specific context. Manchester's also interesting because it is such a well-documented city. I think the project unfolded in a way that didn't really come through and some of the most interesting things weren't necessarily specific to Manchester. But maybe that was impossible given the kind of brief and the time-scale that you and your students were working to.

AG: Have you ever worked with a group like that before? I mean, have you ever had a book that made you want to give it to other people to do other things with?

MD: Not exactly, but I have had projects which I thought would be very interesting to explore through different voices. I did a film based on John Berger's three essays about animals and zoo. In the end that turned into a 50-minute film in which there are ten films within a film...either the person behind the Esso tiger campaign or the man looking after animals who've been neglected and deserted or somebody who made artificial fluffy toys or whatever. They all were about our perceptions of animals and the role animals play in our lives, but it wasn't a singular film, although I was of course the director of all of them. In fact the voice and the form of each of the films was determined by where we were and who was speaking.

AG: And how does it all come together if you work in that way? Do you just hope that it will all hang together or...

MD: No, I think if you have a frame, then it hangs together because it is all connected thematically; you don't have to force the connections. What's interesting is that if you find the right arrangement, as you watch the film you feel the connections and each film modifies the last and collectively it becomes more than the sum of its parts.

AG: And do you think that film can do that in a way that writing can't? That there is something about the medium that enables one to experiment with different perspectives?

MD: I think so. I think the aspect of documentary film that's the least acknowledged is the capacity of film to synthesize and bring together areas of experience which are not normally connected. You can juxtapose a painting, a photograph, a poem, with an experience of something. I think that is the richness of film. You get another kind of depth because of this layering. It is this sense of multiplicity I am interested in. It's what you actually get in the best fiction—this incredible sense of complexity, of emotion, morals, politics, ideas, feelings.

MH: It strikes me that Collins's book is a written form of what you're saying. I see each chapter as a meditation which combines social enquiry, ethnography of what it is to be a child in the city. Each chapter looks at things from a different point of view or perhaps a different level.

MD: I agree, I think particularly it's a much stronger book when you read the original with all the photographs. I think when it's reproduced
in paperback without photographs it seems less of a book. It's like trying to imagine John Berger's about migrant workers, *The Seventh Man* without people. Without photos, the book is made more abstract and the great thing about everything Colin writes is that it's not abstract, it's about people.

[...]

I want to discuss how to break up the world into bits and pieces and put them back together again so that you see the world differently. I like the different pieces to be different, I like the co-existence of paintings and photography and music. I think certain modes of observational documentary provide that in terms of their grammar as it were and I suppose I've never really been drawn to that form of film-making because that's not what I mean to do [...]. In my films I have tried to use the camera as a listening eye. That is why I resist formalism and the locked-off camera which is too prevalent at the moment because I think that denies the camera a response to something that is unexpected, because what you are always going for is the unexpected.

AG: Given that you have worked around children in other films, apart from *Fields of Play*, what did you think the child's perspective would offer on contemporary society and why would Colin Ware's book be an interesting starting point now in the late 1990s?

MD: Well, if you think about play areas it is extraordinary how ball games, such as football, are the dominant influence on kids but in almost every housing estate you go into the first thing you see is a big sign saying 'no ball games'. So you think, on whose behalf is everything changed? And if you look at the current inner-city, particularly northern cities, you realise it is organised for cars and commuters, for people who live outside the city. And all the spaces in the places where you think children might play and move around are simply too dangerous. So if you look from a children's perspective you see the world afresh. If they cannot play, why can't they play? In a tower block what does a mother do when her children want to go out and there is no space for them? So what is good about *The Child in the City* is that it illuminates the problems of the city whether it is poverty or transport, or going to school, or housing, or playing spaces, or public spaces in a way that really shows up the limitations of an adult or official view of the city.

MH: How could you film that? How could you express the child's point of view?

MD: Well that is why I was attracted to the idea that a group of students could make the city in the city their anthropological focus and explore the subject as freely as possible. The project would have a context. I felt it was not the kind of film that you could make by just getting up in the morning and taking a film crew somewhere. You could do something, very superficial things this way, but what you could not do is get close to the children.

MH: So what about the role of interviews in such a film? Would it be very observational?

MD: You can interview children but you have to be prepared to give lots of time to doing it and do it slowly, to be prepared for it not to happen.

MH: There is a wonderful scene in *Ways of Seeing*, where John Berger is in a classroom and they are looking at a painting by Caravaggio. They notice his ambiguous gender identity...

MD: That was incredibly interesting. That was the one experiment that worked in ten that did not! We went to the primary school for the whole day and played all sorts of word games and looked at different paintings, but that is the only one that really came off.

AG: Yes, it really takes off and the discussion just ignites.

MD: This is not to do with children but in completely different film, *About Time*, we were talking to separate groups of steel workers, train
drivers and nesos on the theme of time and work. What was interesting is that as long as you are talking to people about their experience directly you realize they have a tremendously complicated perception of time. They know exactly how time is experienced differently at work and during leisure time, how when you are fishing, time seems to dissolve, how holiday time is different. Steel workers were suddenly talking about menstruation and personal time, you could feel the emotion welling up when they talking about certain things.

There was one fat guy who they all clearly loved and was a union leader. He always got lost on holiday, but he loved fishing. Being drunk when on holiday was the alternative to this very oppressive working life. You suddenly see this awful image of the English on holiday differently and with much greater sympathy. All our lives are so compartmentalized and that is what I think is so terrific about films— you can break down barriers. I think in television, the task of the filmmaker is to break down all those departmental divisions between science, art, history, social observation, etc. Those separations exist for the convenience of broadcasting, but they have nothing to do with what life is about.

AG: Given that people could have used different technologies in The Child in the City project, did you have any ideas as to why sound recording might be a particularly good way of getting at children or why would you use photography?

MD: Well, I think sound recording is almost unnoticeable, so you can get a lack of self-consciousness which is valuable. And from the rhythm of sound recordings, which might be very spontaneous, you get these wonderful nuggets to which you can add images. These images might be historic or stills or activities that the same child might have done in another context. It is a cheap and good way of exploring feelings and thoughts in words.

AG: One of the students who used still photographs was quite interesting. She said the child she worked with had very short attention spans so he had actually tried to follow them with a video camera would have been very frustrating because they were always darting from one thing to another. But using the camera and caching these moments of energy seemed to be the most appropriate way of conveying what was going on in the space, which was not continuous action in the way that films demand. I thought that was quite an interesting observation.

MD: Yes, I think it is and I think things that might seem like a problem might of course be revealing something which is true. Therefore, instead of hiding the problem, work with the problem and say what does that problem reveal about children and their attention spans. You know the Americans want a drug for everything and there's now a syndrome recognized as Attention Disorder and they're now trying to supply thousands and thousands of kids with drugs to focus children's attention. Of course the point was they didn't have any disorder at all. What's terrifying is the idea that there's a gene for lack of attention and they just feel they can 'fix' it with a drug, after a false diagnosis.

AG: How difficult do you think it is, given the moral panic around children do anything with children, particularly take their photographs, take film of them, because people always want to know, well, who's seeing this and in what circumstances?

MD: That's why it's almost impossible to do anything in schools. Not only is it difficult filming children, but it is part of the reason why children are so confined, because of the anxieties about sexual abuse, and other dangers that mean children cannot roam the streets freely or cannot walk back from school. Certainly it's a problem for the filmmaker, but objectively children are having less freedom because their parents won't give them the freedom because of their anxieties.

MH: There obviously is a real issue about children and child abuse. It's of the same order of the drugs example you gave of adults imposing another kind of prison for children and it makes it very difficult to get...
at that child's experience, if you just want to follow them around and see how they view the world. It makes long-term fieldwork very important, to establish confidence.

MD: That's the only way you can do it. You can't do it by descending from the stars.

MH: Which is one of the problems we faced; there just wasn't a line-up, build-up, engagement to it.

MD: The schedule should have been twice as long, and I felt the students could have been pushed further.

AG: What do you mean about being pushed further?

MD: Well, that they could have explored things a little bit more visually, they could have spent more time with the children; some barriers needed longer to break down, such as access to schools, access to families that really trust you. When you think of the richness of the perspectives in Collins' book, I felt quite a lot more could have been pulled out of Manchester. One didn't have much sense of the city, of the social changes, of the Coronation Streets that don't exist, of the blocks that never do, of the sense of the past and present.

AG: So what did you think anthropology students might have to offer to the The Child in the City project as you conceived it?

MD: Time and resource.

AG: Is there anything you think that might be particularly valuable from anthropology research and perspectives?

MD: I suppose the popular view is that anthropology involves looking everywhere except outside your own window, that anthropologists go to Africa and India and steal away to monasteries to document life hundreds of miles away. Of course I've no idea of the politics of the project. I'm sure there's a lot of internal issues about anthropology and definitions of anthropology, etc. But I feel that in every documentary film, at some level, there's a dimension of anthropology whether you're talking about Doing School and some of the more banal does-soops to the most sophisticated documentaries you can imagine.

MH: And they'd also use anthropological-type methods: they'd do field work, they'd get to know people of course.

MD: Yes, but they don't necessarily do it in the way anthropologists do it, there is an advantage in having someone who's a student of anthropology, thinking things through with the moral disciplines of anthropology. At the same time they're actually made to question what observations is, what is the role of the observer, how the observer affects what is being observed.

AG: So you were thinking then of these anthropology students not just being ethnographers, but actually interrogating some of the categories like observer, like child?

MD: Yes, they'd just watch, take notes, write, watch, take photographs, write, video and bring everything to bear on something which is driven by curiosity and observational engagement. ... Can I read you this poem from Berch? It something I've always had above my desk. It's very, very good, it was addressed to actors:

[Your training must be given among
The lives of other people. Make your first school
The place you work in, your home,
The district to which you belong,
The shop, the street, the train.
Observe each one you set eyes upon,
Observe strangers as if they were familiar
And those whom you know as if they were strangers.
All this, watch closely Then, in your mind's eye
From all the struggle waged]
PRICKLY PEAR PAMPHLETS

Prickly Pear was founded in 1993 by the anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Keith Hart. The prickly pear is a humble fruit which grows abundantly in arid places. It may be spiky, but it is refreshing too. The inspiration for the series is the eighteenth century figure of the pamphleteer, who circulated new and radical ideas. We seek to push against the limitations of disciplinary specialisation which increasingly circumscribe academic work. Prickly Pear Pamphlets are free of formal convention as they give expression to the new content of our world. The editors of the series will continue to be dedicated to the development of anthropology as a subject that exposes social reality to creative analysis.

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Make pictures
Unfolding and crossing the wounds in history.

To observe
You must learn to compare.
To be able to compare
You must have observed already.
Poor observation corrupt knowledge.
But knowledge is needed to observe.
He who does not know
What to make of his observation
Will observe badly.

I remember the first time I read that was in the 60s, a translation of Brecht's poems on the theatre. Brecht's and my argument is that observation is not a fly-on-the-wall. What I like is the idea that observation includes coming-closer and it is a dialogue between everything you know and everything you've never seen before, and I think it's a really terrific poem.
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