

AS WORDS FAIL, VISUALS IGNITE: Visual Autoethnography in Tourism

Abstract

This paper presents visual autoethnography as a method for exploring the embodied performances of tourists' experiences. As a fusion of visual elicitation and autoethnographic encounter, visual autoethnography mobilises spaces of understanding; transcending limitations of verbal discourse and opening spaces for mutual appreciation and reflection. The paper proposes, through visual autoethnography, researcher and respondents connect through intersubjective negotiation; unpacking intricate performances and mobilising knowledge exchange through a will to knowledge. Visual autoethnography ignites embodied connections and understanding as visuals become the bridge that connects researcher and respondent experiences within the interview. The paper argues visual autoethnography facilitates the "sharing of speech" and generates "sounds of silence" that facilitate an enriched research space within which previously 'hidden' embodied knowledges are shared.

Keywords

Visual, autoethnography, embodied, photography, performance

WHERE WORDS FAIL, VISUALS IGNITE: OPPORTUNITIES FOR VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY IN TOURISM RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to explore the role of visual autoethnography in unpacking the complexities of embodied, corporeal performances in the tourist experience. Following calls by authors such as Coleman & Crang (2002), Crang (1997, 2002, 2003), Crouch (2000a/b), Edensor, (1998, 2000, 2001), Franklin & Crang (2001) and Rose & Gregson (2000) to address the embodied, performative nature of social practice, methods adopted in research are experiencing significant change. Such shift is paralleled in tourism research as tourism and the tourist experience is no longer identified as a series of linear, static and dislocated spaces made knowable through a series of predetermined actions and behaviours (Franklin & Crang, 2001). Rather, it emerges as a fusion of fluid and dynamic mobilities and materialities, embodied and affectual encounters. Tourism becomes a series of rhythms, flows and fluxes, in-between points and stages through which tourists move in and around place as both imagined and experientially encountered. As research moves to occupy such spaces of the tourist experience and as authors such as Tribe (2004) call for greater intellectual space for ‘new’ research, we must be methodologically equipped to embark on such a journey. New and alternative methods are required that engage with research participants in ways that move beyond the realms of representation to access the haptic, non-representational spaces of encounter and experience.

This paper seeks to develop existing visual methods in tourism and proposes visual autoethnography as one potential route to accessing the embodied, sensual and emotional experiences of tourists’ encounters with place. As Pink (2007) suggests:

“‘visual research methods’ are not purely visual. Rather, they pay particular attention to visual aspects of culture. Similarly, they cannot be used independently of other methods; neither a purely visual ethnography nor an exclusively visual approach to culture can exist” (p. 21).

Where words fail, I suggest visual autoethnography opens spaces of understanding; transcending the limitations of verbal discourse and opening spaces for creativity and appreciation, reflection and comprehension as researcher and respondent explore the intricate performances through which knowledge and encounters of self and other are enlivened. Using a combination of autoethnography and photo-elicitation within the interview setting, visual autoethnography ignites an embodied connection and understanding between researcher and respondent. Thus, conversations materialise through intersubjective negotiation as visuals mobilise an enriched, embodied research space within which previously ‘hidden’ understandings of tourist practice emerge. Mobilising a “sharing of speech” and “sounds of silence”, the image becomes the bridge that connects researcher’s autoethnographic experiences with those of respondent’s as they emerge within the space of the interview.

BEYOND PHOTO-ELICITATION & TOWARDS VISUAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

*Please insert Figure 1 about here

Looking at Figure 1, Donna shared her anticipations of Peru:

- Donna: "...perhaps is like going to the souks...in Tunisia, but I just hope you wouldn't be pestered as much as you are, yeah yeah, that is something I don't want is to be pestered, I don't like bartering...
- Interviewer: ...you almost like imagine the sounds and....
- Donna: ...yeah, I imagine it is going to be bustling, noisy, I can imagine the city, Lima might just be like any other city, but once we get to Cusco, and going up to Machu Picchu I can imagine that it will be fairly Spanish as well, but more agricultural maybe..."

As Pink (2007) realises, using visual methods to access sensory experiences is not entirely a modern-day phenomenon, but finds its origins in the "sensorially-rich" experiences captured in the "haptic film making" practices of Alfred Cort Haddon in 1898. Yet, it was only in the 1990's that researchers (see Classen, 1993) began to address the role of the senses in ethnography. Indeed, the methods upon which we in tourism have long relied, and even disciplines widely experienced in visual methods, have "*given only cursory acknowledgement to the other senses in their arguments for a visual ethnographic methodology*" (Pink, 2007, p. 42). Such transition shifts understanding of vision and the visual away from paradigms of ocularcentrism (Jay, 1997) and reconceptualises the visual as integral to other sensory modalities as we use not only our eyes, but also our minds, bodies, genders, personalities and histories (see Taussig, 1993, cit. Edwards, Gosden & Phillips, 2006; Walker & Chaplin, 1997). Such calls are echoed within tourism as research embraces the plurality of sensual interplays of tourist practice (see for example Crang, 1999; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). Indeed, as the vignette above indicates, tourism exists as a series of entirely embodied practices as tourists encounter the world multidimensionally and multisensually (Crouch & Lubben, 2003; Scarles, 2009). Yet, despite such conceptual shifts, the visual methods employed within tourism research are yet to parallel such change.

Indeed, over the last two decades, visual methods in tourism research have been relatively ad-hoc. As Burns & Lester (2005) suggest: "*As a consequence, a potentially rich seam of evidence that can inform our understanding of tourism as a social construct and set of phenomena has been under-utilised, not to say undermined*" (: 50). Since early work on visuals in tourism by Albers & James (1983) and Cohen (1993), attention to the visual as method in tourism has largely remained confined to the well-rehearsed methods of content analysis (see for example Dann, 1988; Dilley, 1986; Edwards, 1996; Pritchard, 2001; Thurot & Thurot, 1983) and semiotic analysis (see amongst others Markwell, 2001) of tourist media. Indeed, despite increasing attention to the opportunities afforded by visuals such as film (see Bolan 2009; Burns & Lester, 2005), online visual blogging (Dwivedi & Yadav, 2009) and visitor books (see Noy, 2008), the potential of visuals as research methods in tourism has yet to be realised.

Indeed, while the use of photographs as a technique of elicitation in interviews by Collier in 1967, early examples of such techniques in tourism research remained absent until work from authors such as Botterill & Compton (1987) and Botterill (1988, 1989) where photo-elicitation is employed to understand tourist experiences via tourists own photographs. Cederholm (2004), Jenkins (1999) and MacKay & Couldwell (2004) amongst others have also drawn upon photo-elicitation. Such techniques of elicitation can be researcher-led as prescribed photographs are brought to the interview setting or alternatively respondent-led as respondents produce their own

photographs (at times in accordance with instructions set out by the researcher), or bring pre-existing images of particular environments, practices or experiences. Some, like Garrod (2007), refer to such practice as volunteer-employed photography where respondents do not simply introduce their own photographs to the research setting, but actually produce primary data as they are given the task of taking photographs primarily for the purpose of the research.

Since the emergence of photo-elicitation, the advantages of introducing photographs into the interview setting have been well-established. Visuals facilitate rapport, provide security and comfort as respondents reach out, touch or hold the photographs around which conversations develop. They trigger and sharpen respondents' memories and recollections (Cronin & Gale, 1996), facilitate the articulation of ideas and build bridges between the conscious and unconscious as knowledges are retrieved (Harper, 2002). However, turning attention to respondent-led elicitation, it is not only the benefits outlined above that are realised as space also arises for selectivity as respondents are able to "*reflect on their experience of taking the photograph and their decision making regarding what to include in the show (and by implication what to omit)*" (Garrod, 2007). As Radley & Taylor (2003) suggest, the introduction of respondents' photographs offers a "*more powerful tool for eliciting (respondents) experiences than would an interview alone*" (p. 79) (see also Harper, 2002, Pink, 2001).

Talking through photographs increases respondent reflexivity as they are able to verbalise their experiences and knowledges as pictured *by them*, thus eliciting longer, more comprehensive responses (see also Kamler & Threadgold, 2003; Pink, 2001). Warren (2005) refers to such practice as giving respondents "*photo-voice*", as photography provides spaces for self-reflection and subjective positioning of respondents' practice. Thus, respondents are increasingly empowered as ownership shifts away from the researcher and the research agenda is viewed through a variety of 'lenses'. Producing and/or talking around their own visuals affords nuanced insights into practices, behaviours, cultures, social and political relations as respondents express reality as it is significant to them. Thus, elicitation moves towards unpacking the "*complexity of the entanglement of photographic objects in human social relations*" as "*nowadays using photographs in interviews is considered not solely a means of data collection...but as a means of producing data through negotiation and reflexivity*" (Orobitg-Canal, 2004, p. 38).

While such practice provides clear avenues for accessing and articulating insights into tourist behaviour, visual autoethnography exists as a fusion of visual elicitation *and* autoethnographic encounter; an opportunity for accessing and mobilising deeper, nuanced insights into the embodied performances, practices and processes of the tourist experience that recent tourism research addresses. It is no longer enough to listen and respond to respondents' narratives as they emerge via elicited visuals. Rather, such reflexivity extends to researchers as "*subjectivity should be engaged with as a central aspect of ethnographic knowledge, interpretation and representation*" (Pink, 2007, p. 23). Such thought is well-rehearsed, for example: Adkins (2002); Cloke, Crang, Goodwin, Painter & Philo (2003); Coffey (2002); Crang (2003); Denzin & Lincoln (2000), who call for situated researcher reflexivity within research. As Krieger (1996) suggests, there is a need to resituate the 'I' in research in order to generate affiliation and insights and develop a fuller sense of self so that our understanding of others will not become fractured.

Unlike traditional perspectives of ethnography, visual autoethnography does not demand

extended, detailed immersion to facilitate an understanding of grounded ways of life and worldviews via observation. Observation is no longer the method per se; a study of what people say they do and what they are then seen to do and say by observing and recording a series of selected, concrete events (Angrosino & Mays Perez, 2000). Rather, visual autoethnography emerges as a fusion of observation and first-hand experience that is subsequently shared via photographs (or indeed potentially through film) with respondents as researcher subjectivity is embraced within the research setting (see for example: Church, 1995; Morgan & Pritchard, 2005; Sparkes, 2000; Westwood, Morgan & Pritchard, 2006). This does not negate the importance of respondents and their vital role as knowledgeable, situated agents who hold a wealth of rich insights into how the world is seen and lived (Cloke et al., 2003). Rather, it recognises that “*we need to link our statements about what we study with statements about ourselves, for in reality neither stands alone*” (Krieger, 1996, p.191-192).

Thus, visual autoethnography does not seek to mimic or attempt to replicate respondents' experiences, but embraces situated knowledges (Rose, 1997). Researchers become “active agents” (Spry, 2001); themselves engaging in a series of active doings as they experience the research environment first-hand. Space therefore emerges to reflect upon the interacting nature of bodies as the researcher too becomes the subject of research (Scarles & Sanderson, 2007), thus blurring distinctions between personal and social, self and other (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Spry, 2001). However, while traditional autoethnographic practices elevate the “epistemological and ontological nexus upon which the research process turns” (Spry, 2001: 711), resultant texts and subsequent knowledge sharing emerges primarily through researcher reflexivity as expressed in diaries, videos or poems (see Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Noy, 2007a/b; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001). This paper however, suggests that it is in combining researcher and respondent ontologies through active exchange within space of the interview that the poesis of visual autoethnography arises. Researcher autoethnographies are no longer confined to textual representations that in turn are (re)read and (re)interpreted by others. Rather, autoethnographic experiences are reconstructed and *relived* through conversation *with* respondents *through* the visuals presented within the space of the interview as both researcher and respondent reflect upon their experiences within the same, or similar contexts.

While interviews are invariably imbued with researcher intention and purpose that necessitates the very need for researcher/respondent exchange, through visual autoethnography conversations emerge through mutual co-construction. Interviews are inherently imbued with reason as researchers identify a series of thematic priorities to be addressed and guide conversations to ensure such issues are addressed. However, such practice should not assume a linear transference of power and control with researchers as ‘information grabbers’. Rather, flexibility within interviews becomes vital (Cloke et al, 2003; Mason, 2002) as conversations engage both researcher and respondents in a mutual process of non-linear improvisation; each proffering or withholding remembrances and selectively sharing experiences as deemed appropriate. Thus, interviews become fluid, dynamic and mutually responsive performances within which the unpredictable and the unexpected fuse with more apparent pathways of discussion.

In merging subjective horizons, visual autoethnography offers pathways to realising the situatedness of self alongside others that encourages self-reflexivity and critical agency (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Reed-Danahay, 1997; Spry, 2001). It moves beyond representation and realist

agenda that decontextualises subjects and searches for singular truths (Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997) and realises opportunities for multiple selves that “*transform the authorial “I” to an existential “we”*” (Spry, 2001: 711). Thus, autoethnography mobilises a critical engagement; a will to knowledge (Foucault, 1977) that strives to access the multiplicity of truths that exist within a mesh of power relations. In embracing the multiplicities of self and other, it strives to move beyond discursive productions, productions of power and the propagation of knowledge that potentially limit expressions of self and other. It provides translations rather than descriptions; insights into the experiential world of tourism rather than representations of the tourist experience (Noy, 2007) that mobilise “*blendings of genres and voices*” (Brettell, 1997, cit. Reed-Danahay, 1997). Thus, responding to Crang’s (2003) call for a move from work that “*divides positionality formulaically into being insiders (good but impossible) and outsiders (bad but inevitable)*” (p.496), visual autoethnography does not claim to reposition researcher as ‘tourist’ or ‘insider’, but rather negotiates researcher subjectivity towards the centre of the research process as ‘researcher-as-tourist’. Authenticities of ‘insider’ are deconstructed as truths arise via the multiple and shifting identities that characterise our lives are explored (Reed-Danahay, 1997) to move beyond a “systematic blindness; a refusal to see and understand” (Foucault, 1977: 55).

In reversing such blindness and opening the possibilities of multiple truths, research spaces expose the *lived* nature of experiences. Through visual autoethnography, researchers are no longer removed or distanced, but are situated within research, geographically, socially, culturally, economically and politically. We live and breathe the research environment, engaging in the kinaesthetic nature of research (see Crang, 2003, Spinney, 2006, Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000). Through self-witnessing we commit our bodies to the intimacies of experiential encounters and become witness to place for ourselves. Indeed, such is the implicit role of our bodies in our research (see also Crang, 2003) that the sharing of autoethnographic encounters as personal, intimate moments of self (Noy, 2007), becomes integral to the togetherness that emerges through the use of visuals. As research seeks to unpack the “*felt, touched and embodied constitutions of knowledge*” (ibid, p. 501), togetherness arises by sharing perspectives of selves; bridging or transcending social and cultural difference as researcher and respondent are brought together through common terrain that produces mutually intelligible meanings (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

However, such exchange is not limited only to positive encounters. As Noy (2007) suggests, autoethnography also embraces potential negative experiences, that resonate with sadness and alienation, mundane or “deviant” behaviours (Noy, 2007). In reflecting upon experiences of self and other as they arise through conversation within the interview setting, visual autoethnography not only acknowledges the “concrete and symbolic” spaces of tourism, but confronts and explores the complexities of experiences memories, denials and emotions (Noy, 2007). Therefore, in embracing the potential for a multiplicity of touristic practices, conversations mobilise or stimulate exchanges that may otherwise remain ‘hidden’ through the selectivity of reflexive performance.

Indeed, visual autoethnography should not assume agreement between subjectivities as disjuncture can also arise as moments of researcher and respondent commonality are pervaded by difference as both come to the interview space with potential disparities in worldviews and belief systems. However, such differences should not be feared, as the potential of such clashes can

indeed serve to further unpack (and indeed emphasise) the multiplicity of touristic performances that challenge discursive productions of the tourist gaze and imagination, thus further enriching research *and* respondent understanding of the spectrum of encounters, emotions and feelings through which tourist experiences arise. Indeed, while the inherent mimesis of the visual cannot be denied, as Rose (2001) suggests, there exists a multiplicity of ways of responding to visuals. Visuals become culturally fashioned extensions of the senses (Lury, 1998) and thus, visual autoethnography provides a pathway to unpacking a series of potentialities and possibilities through which the intricacies of the tourist experience can be shared as respondents use visuals to “*fashion their feelings...and make them visible*” (Radley & Taylor, 2003, p.80). Indeed, it is the role of visual autoethnography in accessing such embodied experiences (Westwood, 2007) that is of interest in this paper.

Within visual autoethnography, visuals therefore become more than merely prompts or ‘safety nets’, but offer gateways for merging reflexive subjectivities; the bridge that connects researcher’s and respondent’s experiences as they emerge within the space of the interview. As pathways *to* and *of* multisensual encounter, they become tools for complementing, reinforcing and challenging shared experiences and it is such attention to reflexive embodied performance that holds “*the potential for articulating emergent subjectivities which encompass reality, imagination and reason, difference and commonality*” (Edwards et al., 2006, p. 11). Importance therefore lies not in the content of photographs in interviews per se, but in the reason and need for their being (Crang, 2003; Rose, 2003a/b, Ryan, 2003) in “*attempt to understand what has been made visible and why*” (Radley & Taylor, 2003, p. 79). Indeed, it is the emergent intersubjective encounters that transpire as a result of autoethnographic experiences that further deepen our understanding of the intricacies and nuances of the embodied performances of tourism that have to date eluded tourism research.

Visual autoethnography therefore demands researchers move to embrace traditionally “forbidden narratives” (Church, 1995) that deny silent authorship (see for example: Charmaz & Mitchell, 1997; Church, 1995; Holt, 2003) as research is expressed in the first-person. As researchers’ personal narratives, experiences and reflections infuse conversations, the use of first-person emphasises resultant intersubjectivities. Ellis & Bochner (2000) refer to this process of committing our selves to research; expressing self through dialogue, emotion, self-consciousness and reflection. That is, by writing in the first person, autoethnography enables the researcher to “*connect the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context*” (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Therefore, as the paper now moves away from the theoretical understandings and towards my own personal experiences of autoethnography in research and the opportunities it affords, I too will introduce my own voice and personal narrative.

ACCESSING THE RESEARCHER ‘SELF’ AND TOURIST ‘OTHER’

The findings of this paper arise from a larger study which thesis sought to renegotiate the role of the visual within the tourist experience; exploring the role of visuals as both mobilising and being mobilised by a series of embodied, political, reflexive and ethical performances as tourists anticipate, rewrite and remember place (see x, 2009). Interviews were conducted with sixteen British tourists at three stages of their experience: pre-travel, mid-travel and post-travel. Of these, six were longitudinal and ten were semi-longitudinal (pre- and post-travel), the remaining mid-

travel interviews were conducted on an ad-hoc basis with UK tourists during their holiday in Peru. The sample displayed an even division of men and women and included a wide range of ages from early twenties to those in their sixties and seventies. All tourists travelled to Peru as part of a two to three week organised small-group tour. Respondents were accessed via tour operators who distributed research information leaflets with client's final confirmation documents. Leaflets were also distributed directly to potential respondents at tour operator slideshow presentations and travel exhibitions.

Tourists' engagement with visuals at each stage of the tourist experience was explored using tourist brochures, postcards and tourists own photographs they select to share as best reflecting their experiences of anticipating place, or of selectively rewriting and remembering their experiences. Indeed, it should be noted that while the nature of the wider research positioned photography as the medium of knowledge sharing, respondents were not discouraged to discuss the alternative ways in which touristic experiences were performed. Nevertheless, while one respondent (Gillian) created scrapbooks of material traces such as tickets, maps and receipts, for all other respondents, photography remained the sole, principle activity in their performances of place. Indeed, while beyond the scope of this paper, future work on visual autoethnography need not remain confined to photography, but may extend to embrace video diaries and other visual practice such as scrapbooking. Likewise, in exploring the range of touristic expression, the opportunity also exists for further research into areas such as audio-autoethnographies where evocative experiences are shared using alternative representations such as music or poetry.

To gain autoethnographic insights, I became "researcher-as-tourist" during my fieldwork. I travelled with my partner on our own two-week holiday around Peru that followed the same route as respondents had experienced. Like respondents, I too held and shared my anticipations of place and followed the tourist trail and engaged in similar activities that they *may have* encountered. I ate traditional Peruvian cuisine and listened to the Andean musicians alongside other tourists in restaurants. I walked the Inca Trail, purchased and sent postcards and felt the compulsion and obligation to photograph both the appealing and unsettling aspects of cultures and landscapes, including Machu Picchu (see Figure 2). Practices of observation by doing therefore established a first-hand appreciation and understanding of Peru through which I, as researcher, accessed deeper connection and understanding with respondents (Angorosino & Mays Perez, 2000). The focus of observation did not centre on following respondents as they moved in and around Peru. Rather, I immersed myself within my own practices in order to gain a deeper appreciation for the range of attitudes, habits, emotions and skills respondents *may* experience as they anticipated, experienced and remembered their journey to Peru.

* Please insert figure 2 about here

Subsequently, by reflecting upon first-hand experiences and sharing respondents' photographs of their holidays in Peru, interviews become rich negotiations as researcher positionality moves from researcher to researcher-as-fellow-tourist. Attention now turns to the application of visual autoethnography as I explore the ways in which intersubjectivity facilitates the "sharing of speech" and the "sounds of silence".

SHARING OF SPEECH: ARTICULATING EMBODIED PERFORMANCES

First, drawing upon research by Scarles & Sanderson (2007), visual autoethnography provides the opportunity for sharing speech as spaces open through which respondents are able to articulate embodied performances. Radley & Taylor (2003) suggest conversations emerge as researcher and respondent make readings of visuals together. However, unlike elicitation, visual autoethnography mobilises togetherness as moments of mutual encounter erode boundaries between researcher and respondent through shared articulation of experiences of place as pictured. As I became researcher-as-tourist, many respondents commented on the ‘travel connection’ or ‘understanding’ that emerged between us. For some, such connection was juxtaposed against the frustration of articulating the intensity of experiences when sharing photographs and experiences with family and friends: “*when you are showing other people, you would look at the best bit first and then it’s just a bit boring after that...it wouldn’t be for you or me because we have been there. It means something*” (Martin). Visuals therefore become gateways for expressing a deeper appreciation of the multiplicity of attitudes, habits, sentiments, emotions, sensibilities and preferences of tourists’ experiences. Where respondents used photographs to express their elation at reaching Machu Picchu (Maggie), their disgust or delight at eating cuy (roast guinea pig) (Gillian), their wonder at the array of food stuffs in the markets or the brightly coloured clothes, their shock and sadness at the families living in poverty (Les) or even the pain in their feet as they trekked the Inca trail (Abbi), I too was able to share in their response as I recalled and shared my own experiences of my time spent doing similar activities.

Such expression of mutuality draws parallels with Roland Barthes’ theory of anchorage and relay. For Barthes (1977), anchorage relates to text accompanying images that allow readers to “*choose the correct level of perception*” as it “*permits me to focus not simply my gaze but also my understanding*” (p. 39), thus minimising the potential of misinterpretation. Therefore, within visual autoethnography, visuals and the accompanying narrative serve to secure experiences via the mimesis of that pictured. However, as conversations continue, the polysemic nature of the visual and opportunities for *relay* come to the fore. For Barthes, the concept of *relay* exists as:

“text and image stand in a complementary relationship; the words, in the same way as the images, are fragments of a more general syntagm and unity of the message is realised at a higher level, that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis” (p. 41).

The role of the photograph as a visual fragment of experience becomes central; anchoring conversation while simultaneously opening the possibility of exploring experiences beyond those pictured. Subsequently, conversation emanates from the visual as researcher and respondent find commonality through mutual experience of similar encounters and relay is manifest through shared stories and anecdotes.

Through visual autoethnography, researchers are no longer removed or distanced, but are situated within research, geographically, socially, culturally, economically and politically. Our bodies are committed to conversational exchanges through self-witnessing as we share intimate moments of self as practised. As research seeks to unpack the “*felt, touched and embodied constitutions of knowledge*” (Cragg, 2003, p. 501), respondents are supported and *understood* by mutual appreciation. Such appreciation and connection is exemplified as Angela shared her experiences of the Nasca Desert (see Figure 3):

Angela: “I mean this is an example of the sort of place where I would take to...illustrate how I was feeling. It was just so empty and...that signifies that to me, its like people were here once and now they are not

Interviewer: and it's so small in itself and there is no one there

Angela: yeah and I was feeling very tiny at that point because it was just such an enormous situation

Interviewer: that...made me...now I feel really quite...kind of vulnerable almost"

*Please insert Figure 3 about here

Barriers of discomfort and unease are permeated and opportunities to explore embodied encounters of place emerge as the visual creates a bridge between the experiences of researcher and respondent. Consequently, the conversation with Angela moved to explore issues such as opening of the graves of the Nasca people, imagined histories and the deep intensity, vastness and vulnerability of self in the desert that I too had experienced. Thus, conversations are enlivened as researcher and respondent engage in enriched communication; sharing intricate feelings, reflections and emotions of the tourist experience. Our conversation continued:

Angela: "(it's) an amazing place, it just sort of came crashing home to me how dangerous a place it was...(the)second driest place in the world, we were out there, there was a wind whipping across the plane so it didn't feel hot and you are just thinking I am dehydrating so fast if they drove off and left me it would be two, three hours and that's it, that's all I could hang on for. Plus these rocks were so beautiful, the colours were lovely and that, I mean this is an example of the sort of place where I would take to...illustrate how I was feeling. It was just so empty and that, that signifies that to me, it's like people were here once and now they are not....and I was feeling very tiny at that point because it was just such an enormous situation...,

Interviewer: and yet the emotions and feelings and messages

Angela: its quite incredible isn't it,

Interviewer: you can convey just through, which in itself is just an empty photograph,

Angela: ...and this is when it becomes very, very personal. I mean it's different for you because you have been there but if someone else was flicking through these they would see a bit of sand, a bit of rock and a little hut. Yeah, and it doesn't mean anything at all"

While visuals served to overcome the potential subjective differences (e.g. gender, race, age, social status, profession, etc) that can emerge through conversation and facilitated respondents' ability to share the embodied, reflexive encounters that stimulated the need to take the photograph, such interpretation should not be assumed to infer an ease of exchange. Just as Rose (1997) shared her apprehensions of subjectivity as one interviewee joked that he was "*being interviewed for Radio 4*" (p. 306), the potential for clashing subjectivities remains a constant challenge. My position as a (relatively) young, female academic inevitably influenced my ability to strike rapport with respondents who were from a range of age, gender, social and cultural backgrounds and professions. During the research, some respondents experience varying degrees of ease or difficulty in expressing themselves and sharing their experiences. Likewise, differences also invariably arose in the way in which they engaged with photographs and photography and subsequently expressed their experiences during interviews. Indeed, on seeing Figure 1, Les (Donna's husband) commented:

Interviewer: we were just talking about how when Donna is looking at the photographs she can imagine Peru and being there and walking through the market and relates it back to when you were in Tunisia, do you look at images that way?

Les: ...I think I have got preconceived ideas of what there is there and the images you see in there....I imagine there will be street markets there in towns which are pretty much like street markets everywhere else, local people will be selling local produce, but they will also be trying to sell you touristy things

Interviewer: so you read images in relation to other things that you know...and in a way you can, hear the sounds that you might hear because of what you know markets to sound like or smell like...

Les: I don't think so; no...my preconceptions...are very much what I have...seen (on the TV)"

During interviews, the flow of conversation inevitably varied between respondents. However, it was through our shared commonalities: a desire to travel, the importance of photography in our travel experiences and a seemingly genuine interest in sharing experiences, that conversations emerged as a rich negotiation, sharing and mutual understanding of experience. In sharing both our commonalities and differences, both I and respondents were no longer imprisoned within a pre-determined framework that confine and restricts the flow of conversation. Rather, in acknowledging differences in practices and behaviours, visual autoethnography generated knowledge that would otherwise remain undisclosed. However, as conversations moved beyond the factual practice and process of holiday selection into lay knowledges and experiences, respondents often became uncertain or frustrated as words were no longer enough. In exploring moments of tacit experience, it was not uncommon for discursive discrepancies to emerge as respondents experienced an inability to verbalise embodied, affectual connections with place and it is to this that attention now turns.

SOUNDS OF SILENCE: INHERENT LACKING AND ULTIMATE FAILURE

With sharing of speech also come the sounds of silence. As visuals facilitate moments of reflection, respondents inevitably experience moments of fleeting or extended reflection as they clarify their thoughts or momentarily re-embody themselves in place via reflexive performance (x, 2009). As conversation moves to explore the tacit moments of embodied, affectual performances within tourism, it is not uncommon for discursive discrepancies to arise as respondents become unable to express themselves via dialogue or narrative. As words fail, visual autoethnography opens the possibility of sounds of silence as visuals allow respondents to reflect upon and imaginatively reignite their embodied practices and performances of place. As Orobitch-Canal (2004) suggests, "*both photographic content and the narratives photographs evoke, offer...routes to knowledges that cannot be achieved by verbal communication*" (p. 38). The intangible therefore is expressed through the materiality of the visual as visual autoethnography holds the potential to unlock the expression of encounters that would otherwise remain excluded from conversation. Thus, silence sporadically occupies the space of the interview as respondents are left unable to verbally convey moments of affectual connection. Such silences should not be assumed as absolute quietness as respondents sit devoid of expression or communication. Rather, despite the limitations of verbal communication, non-verbal communication generates sounds of silence as expression resonates through the visual.

First, the ultimate failure of words can create intense ramblings or alternative moments of intense frustration as respondents are left unable to articulate their feelings. As such, the limitations of verbal communication may halt or puncture conversation as respondents can only ever partially impart the intensity of affectual connections to place. Therefore, while respondents at times continue in their struggle to convey that which they feel, such lacking highlights the importance of the embodied nature of experiences. Sounds of silence therefore arise in what is *not* said; the gaps in vocabulary or limitations in expression as words fail the needs of respondents. As Harrison (2008) suggests:

“we find ourselves always already within patterns and regimes of truth as the very resources which allow us to aggress or disagree. We come to ourselves already entwined in the unfolding historicity of many such regimes that our intentions...our desires, action and words will never have been quite our own” (p. 19).

Therefore, as respondents struggle to find the words to convey their experience, they become tied to the confines of discursive expression and collective expression. Such containment is exemplified by Olivia as she attempts to convey her experience on the Altiplano:

it just really captures what I am not able to put into words sometimes....it was a beautiful view, the sunlight, the way it was...on (the) mountains...you just you have got that lovely sun and the surrounding peace...it's utter silence...you could almost record the silence...its so different...you cant put it into words and I am going to run out of adjectives (see Figure 4).

As I reflected upon my own experiences of the Altiplano, conversation continued:

Interviewer: and it's moments like that that you don't photograph

Olivia: it is because you don't want to spoil it or something but...you can't get it here now

and yes, ok you can go walking in the mountains, but you don't seem to have an absolute

silence or feeling that there is nobody else..

Interviewer: total isolation

Olivia: total isolation that's it, it's weird and that's what we want to try and capture in photographs

but we do up to a point

Interviewer: yeah but then there's the point where it stops working...

*Please insert Figure 4 about here

Secondly, sounds of silence can arise as respondents abandon attempts at verbal expression. While such silences can inevitably create discomfort, awkwardness and fractures in conversation, visual autoethnography holds the potential to ignite non-verbal communication as silence is replaced with an unspoken 'knowing' between respondent and researcher. As Angrosino & Mays Perez (2000) suggest, body language and gestural clues come to lend meaning to words and responses. In observing and responding to respondents' bodily reactions, researchers gain deeper insights as their embodied reflexive performances, ignited by engagement with the visual, communicate that which words can not. In such moments of silent contemplation, photographs redirect attention away from my presence and become vessels for self-reflection as visuals become co-performers in

respondents' reflection (Holm, 2008; Scarles, 2009). Whether fleeting or extended, moments of contemplative silence not only enable respondents to clarify thoughts (Kamler & Threadgold, 2003, Pink, 2001), but offer opportunity to relive past experiences as shared with researcher as that-which-has-been (Barthes, 1977) is reignited within the space of the interview. Visuals become pathways into "*understanding the immediacy of experience*" (Scarles, 2009: x), that recognises experiences "*not just as a physical setting, but an orientation, a feeling, a tendency*" (Radley & Taylor, 2003, p. 24). Thus, reflective performances through visuals can launch moments that express corporeal uniqueness as emotions exceed expression in language and erupt into gesture (Elkins, 1998; Mulvey, 1986).

* Please insert Figure 5 about here

Sharing her experiences of an encounter with local children during a visit to a school (see Figure 5), Sarah reflected:

"these guys are laughing because they are getting balloons, fruit, pencils. He is singing me a song, they stood there and...they got things, they did another one, they got things, there's another picture I have with the kids running down the street and I am thinking "oh, Jesus do I have enough?"...but so many kids that we gave things to, I mean when we got right out into the country and we were giving them sweets we had to show them how to unwrap that, anyway...(gets very upset and stops talking)"

Very quickly, emotions took over as Sarah fought back her tears: the embodied intensity of the memory taking over. However, I too had met children living in similar conditions to those Sarah had photographed. I became absorbed in my personal reflection; sympathetic to the intensity of her reflections as the children in the photograph reminded me of those I had met and her emotions triggered and mediated my own reflexive performance. We sat together in silence, sharing a feeling: a sadness and humble appreciation. Words failed and silence prevailed as Sarah's tears and sadness filled the space of the interview. Our attention turned to the visual that lay between us. Indeed, while advocates of photo-elicitation talk of the comfort, security and contemplation offered to respondents by photographs (Harper, 2002), with visual autoethnography such reassurance and comfort is also experienced by the researcher as I too found solace of reflexivity through Sarah's photograph. Indeed, had figure 5 not been present, such reflexive affinity would have remained beyond the grasp of the research encounter.

As words fail, betweenness emerges as respondent and researcher share a vulnerability of self (Behar, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Vulnerability does not manifest as threat or exploitation of the physical self, but rather materialises as the corporeality of vulnerability (Harrison, 2008). It "*is not the antithesis of strength, imperviousness or resistance*", but "*describes the inherent and continuous susceptibility of corporeal life to the unchosen and the unforeseen*" (ibid, p. 5). Thus, within visual autoethnography, a mutual vulnerability emerges as both researcher and respondent open their selves to each other; each revealing emotions and opening intimacies to the scrutiny of others. The visual becomes a vessel through which vulnerability becomes a condition of the research connection. It offers stability, security and comfort. Mutual vulnerability realised through trust transposes spaces of doubt: a bond that joins researcher and respondent as "tourists-who-have-travelled-to-Peru". The visual becomes a space of shared corporeal expressions that reveal

emotions and open intimacies of self as exchange moves into the realms of sensate life (Smith, 2001, cit. Cloke et al., 2003).

Thus, the ultimate failure of verbal expression should not be misinterpreted as the end of communication; a hopeless dead-end from which researchers and respondents must retreat. Rather, by combining visuals with autoethnography, where words fail, visuals ignite and (non-verbal) communication continues. As aforementioned, a negotiation of selves emerges as *both* researcher and respondent bring personal experiences, insights and understandings of the issues raised to the space of the interview. Whether conveying their awe at the first site of Machu Picchu, the vastness of the altiplano or the sense of achievement at reaching a mountain summit, it is the intensity of frustrations, the vexation and ultimate hopelessness of representation expressed by many respondents that emphasises the importance of moments of non-representation. It is in such moments that doing, becoming and the role of somatic knowledges enriches findings (Thrift & Dewsbury, 2000). Thus, visual autoethnography facilitates poetic continuations that bridge the gap between the represented and non-representable.

CONCLUSIONS

As tourism research moves to explore the embodied performances of tourism, this paper has explored the role of visual autoethnography as contributing to a new orthodoxy of qualitative methods to access embodied, sensual and emotional experiences of the tourist experience. Responding to authors such as Pink (2007), it proposes that in order to realise the potential of the visual within methodological practice, it is necessary to reposition visuals as pathways *to* and *of* multisensual encounter; tools for complementing, reinforcing and sharing the visualities of the practices and processes of both their production and consumption. Offering a combination of photo-elicitation and autoethnography, visual autoethnography provides a route to access both the tangible and intangible spaces of embodied performance as reflexivity extends to both respondents and researchers and knowledge is shared through a merging of subjectivities within the space of the interview. It therefore holds considerable potential for research into experiential elements of tourism such as: tourists' experiences of destinations and practices within specific contexts (e.g. Andriotis (2009) and Belhassen, Caton & Stewart (2008)'s work on religious tourism, or Maher, Steel & MacIntosh (2003)'s work on tourism in Antarctica), tourists attitudes (e.g. Mohsin, 2005) and awareness (e.g. Becken, 2007), or identity construction in tourism (e.g. Palmer, 2005) to name but a few.

In visual autoethnography, both respondents and researchers therefore move to occupy an *active* role in the emotional and transformative process of research as the materiality of the image offers a fragment of self as performed. Thus, the tangibility of the visual allows respondents to re-enliven a range of wholly embodied and sensual habits, practices and behaviours of the tourist experience. Researcher subjectivity becomes central to accessing and sharing the embodied, sensual performances of the tourist experience. Drawing upon well-rehearsed calls for self-reflexivity in research, visual autoethnography facilitates the move to resituate the 'I' in research (Krieger, 1996). As a method, it mobilises a blend of subjectivities via the process of self-witnessing as researchers commit their body to the field, realising knowledges and experiences through a fusion of observation and first-hand experiences. By fusing researcher autoethnographic and respondent experiences, conversations emerge as a negotiation of subjectivities; an

intersubjective way-finding (Thrift & Pile, 1995) as both researcher and respondent share first-hand experiences. Visuals therefore provide a bridge as researcher and respondent merge through intersubjective exchange; an active, dynamic co-construction that seeks to explore, understand and challenge existing knowledges of both practice of tourism and research.

In merging subjectivities, visual autoethnography gives rise to the “sharing of speech” and “sounds of silence. With regard to the sharing of speech, spaces of shared articulation emerge as visual autoethnography enriches the fluidity and dynamism of intersubjective exchange. Articulation is no longer confined to verbal expression, but unfolds through the fusion of verbal and non-verbal communication. The visual therefore becomes a platform for sharing encounters; facilitators of mutual exchange that ignites conversation. Drawing upon Barthes (1977) concept of anchorage and relay, the paper suggests visuals provide the focal point of conversation as researcher and respondent find commonality through mutual experience of similar encounters to those pictured. However, it is via relay that negotiations of subjective experience reveal nuances and intricacies of experience. Consequently, visual autoethnography mobilises a *togetherness*: an understanding and connection as subjectivities co-join as tourists-who-have-been-to-Peru. Knowledge and insight unfold in the immanence of the interview as conversation transcends surface level exchange as researcher and respondent identify moments of mutual understanding, experience and appreciation. Thus, visual autoethnography opens spaces within which deeper, nuanced and affectual knowledges are expressed as subjective experiences are shared.

However, with speech also come the sounds of silence. As Radley & Taylor (2003) suggest, it is the presence of the visual in the interview environment that allows respondents to not only describe their surroundings and experiences, but to convey orientations, feelings and tendencies. Where words fail, visuals become vessels of self-reflection and co-performers in the emerging intersubjective exchange. Silences reverberate with sound, unspoken embodied knowledges, as visuals launch moments of corporeal uniqueness that erupt into gesture as our bodies become central not only to the experiences and encounters as relived and shared. Both researcher and respondent become vulnerable as they expose their selves; each finding solace within the visual as they come together in sharing the intensities of emotions, somatic knowledges and haptic spaces of encounter. Through the intersubjective exchange afforded by visual autoethnography a *betweenness* emerges between respondent and researcher that goes beyond words as they come together to reach that which cannot be verbally expressed. In doing so, intersubjective exchange materialises as shared corporeal expression as the immanence of encounter opens intimacies of the self and where words fail, visuals ignite.

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