Despite the growing popularity of amateur video-making, documented in Chapter 1, it has been generally neglected by academic researchers. While the widespread availability of video cameras is a relatively recent development, popular photography and amateur film-making have a much longer history; yet these too have largely fallen below the academic radar. This chapter considers previous work on these topics, and seeks to identify some of the broader questions at stake in understanding such popular representational practices. In the process, it looks beyond these visual media to other forms of artistic endeavour, as well as considering more general issues to do with amateurism, leisure, creativity and learning.

**Media in the home: From consumption to production**

Recent research on the everyday use of media in the home has focused almost exclusively on people’s activities as ‘consumers’ rather than producers. There is quite a long history of research on families’ uses of television (e.g. Morley, 1986; Lull, 1990), although in recent years much of this work has concentrated on Information and Communication Technologies (e.g. Berker et al., 2006; Haddon, 2004; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). This research focuses on the ‘domestication’ of technology: that is, on the ways in which it is appropriated and incorporated into the fabric of domestic life. It considers how the use of technology changes over time, how it relates to the dynamics and power-relationships within the household and how it varies according to the values or ‘moral economy’ of the family. More recent research has pointed to the flexibility of these processes, and to the fact that the boundaries between the home and the wider world may be fluid and porous (e.g. Bakardjieva, 2006).
This research usefully cautions against deterministic ideas about the ‘effects’ of technology on family life, and linear notions of how technological innovations are diffused within society. However, it remains strangely focused on equipment. While there is some discussion of what people do with equipment, or the content that they access through it, these things often appear only as examples: the focus is typically on the television, the computer or the mobile phone as a medium in its own right.

Furthermore, these studies rarely refer to people’s creative or productive uses of media, even in the case of home computers; and studies of domestic photography, film- or video-making are few and far between. There is only one book-length study of home video production, James Moran’s *There’s No Place Like Home Video* (2002) – although, as we shall see below, it remains curiously evasive when it comes to discussing what people actually do with video cameras in the home.

One of the most useful starting points remains Richard Chalfen’s account of domestic photography and film-making, *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), which is based on material gathered from middle-class US families during the 1960s and 1970s. Chalfen’s analysis of what he calls the ‘home mode’ – that is, the use of media to represent the private world of domestic life – is essentially anthropological: he is interested in domestic media-making as an everyday symbolic practice, and is concerned to uncover the implicit social norms on which it is based. He provides a useful analytical method that focuses, for example, on the different roles that people take up when making home movies; what, when and how they choose to film; what counts as a ‘good’ shot or sequence and how the resulting footage is edited, manipulated and exhibited. The focus here, then, is on the rules and conventions that govern the social practice of media-making, rather than its psychological significance for the individual.

Chalfen finds that there is a complete contrast between the prescriptions offered in ‘How To Do It’ manuals about photography and home movie-making and what people actually do in practice – an issue that we shall return to in the following chapter. Thus, people rarely plan or edit their films; they pan and zoom wildly in their efforts to capture events; and they show people posing or ‘acting up’ rather than behaving naturally. Home movies typically focus on a very narrow spectrum of the available subjects: they avoid banal or potentially taboo areas in favour of predictable footage of vacations, special family events or shots of people posing, waving or simply staring at the camera. Likewise, snapshot photographs tend to feature carefully chosen moments in the