

Technologies of Realism? Ethnographic Uses of Photography and Film

MIKE BALL AND GREG SMITH

INTRODUCTION: IMAGES IN THE AGE OF THEIR TECHNICAL REPRODUCTION

This chapter considers methodological and theoretical contexts for the employment of still photographs and moving film in ethnographic reports. It sketches these uses in light of the historical development of fieldwork, ethnography and participant observation in order to show how they reflect theoretical and epistemological concerns. On to our historical consideration of these methods we chart developments in photographic, film and video representational technologies. From within this framework we ask, what role do pictorial and filmic materials play in the predominantly written inscriptions of ethnographic reports?

The chapter consequently draws upon studies in visual sociology and visual anthropology¹ to explore the scope and potential of photography and film in ethnography. Our examination differs from earlier surveys (e.g. Ball and Smith, 1992; Chaplin, 1994; Grady, 1996; Harper, 1994; Henney, 1986)² in that it frames ethnographic usage of visual methods in terms of broad shifts in visual technology and associated viewing competences. In particular we want to articulate the significance of the linkage between photography, the realism debates it engenders and modernity. We further wish to suggest some of the potential and problems associated with ethnographic applications of the emergent representational forms characteristic of what are variously and contentiously described as late modern (Giddens, 1990) or post-modern societies (see Table 21.1).

Our cultural and historical approach is designed to throw into relief changing conceptions of visual

methods. The application by ethnographers of visual methods occupies the interface between what technological developments make possible and current conceptions of ethnography. As each of these alters, applications of visual methods will change. Currently this is exemplified by developments within the new information and communication technologies (ICTs), especially digitalization and the multimedia opportunities afforded by the increasing availability of computer technology and the rapid growth of the Internet. The broad shifts in the character of visual culture resulting from technological developments can be summarized ideal-typically as in Table 21.1. This conceptualization extends themes from Benjamin's ([1936] 1973) essay on the fate of the work of art when technical methods permit its easy reproduction.

Benjamin ([1936] 1973) asked how art was changed when it can be readily reproduced by mechanical – or, better, 'technical' (Snyder, 1989) – methods. Film and photography (and other recording technologies) allow large quantities of copies to be made of an art work. Yet, for Benjamin, the notable feature of the art work in premodern societies was its *aura* arising from its unique existence and its embeddedness in tradition.

In premodern societies, paintings and other art objects possessed a secure meaning, which arose from their clear anchorage in the ceremonial practices of particular social groups. The 'presence' generated by the art object, the sense of reverence it elicited, stemmed from its location in tradition. The art work was an original 'text' in the sense that it existed in a specific place and could only be seen and appreciated *in situ*. According to Benjamin's argument, art objects were encapsulated in a 'pod' of awe.

Table 21.1 *Types of society, modes of pictorial representation and their associated reading positions*

Traditional society	Autographic (handmade) images	Worshippers
Modernity	Photographic and cinematographic images	Viewers
Late modernity/ postmodernity	Electronic images	Interactive users

The power of a work of art derived from its singularity and its location in tradition that lent it aura.

Efficient and accurate methods of reproduction, Benjamin argues, dislocate art from tradition. Once art is subject to non-traditional interpretation the way is paved to its politicization. Benjamin also draws attention to an art object's 'exhibition value', which he traces to the development of photography and film. Benjamin further suggests that methods of technical reproduction introduce new, more precise standards of depiction that significantly alter perceptual schemes.

Benjamin's theory of aura and reproduction can be adapted to understand some very general features of modes of pictorial representation and the position of the perceiver. This is summarized in Table 21.1. The visual representational technologies (photography, film) associated with modernity change our relation to the seen world. Generalizing, with the emergence of modern society there is a shift in the position of the perceiver of visual imagery from worshipper to viewer. The easy availability of photographic images in modern societies annuls the sense of aura historically attached to visual representations in premodern societies. The conjecture we wish to explore in the latter part of this chapter is that image perceivers' position is changing again with the increasing accessibility of electronic images characteristic of late modern or postmodern societies. This shift has implications for ethnographic practice using pictorial materials since sociology and anthropology are decidedly creatures of modernity (Clifford, 1988; Nisbet, 1967). Born around the same time and place, sociology, anthropology and photography (Becker, 1975; Pinney, 1992) share similar preoccupations with realism.

As Benjamin's discussion of aura implies, photography and film are each nineteenth-century technical innovations that have made a major impact on the development and apprehension of the visual cultures of modernity and late modernity. In the following sections we consider how photography and film have promoted a concern with the realistic representation of the world – a claim that needs to be approached cautiously.

REALISM AND THE DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

We begin with a brief review of significant technical developments in the history of photography

and film before moving to a consideration of the documentary tradition, the photographic and filmic genre that stands closest to the realist concerns of ethnography. Interestingly, there are broad parallels in the development of the documentary tradition and ethnographic method. The following section traces the reprising of realist themes in the early history of ethnographic photography and film.

Cameras existed long before photographs did. The *camera obscura* was in widespread use as a drawing aid by the sixteenth century, although the principle on which it was based (light entering a small room or box through an aperture or lens throws an inverted image against the back wall) was known to the ancients. Photography is a modernist technology whose history is a complex and contested story. In one version Fox Talbot invented modern photography around 1839. For most of the nineteenth century photography remained in the hands of a group of technical specialists. The first Kodak camera appeared in 1888 but it was only the marketing in 1899 of the Brownie box camera that put photography into the hands of large sections of European and North American societies. In 1895 the brothers Louis and Auguste Lumière invented the cinematograph, a portable movie camera. Other landmarks include the marketing in 1923 of the Leica, the first SLR 35mm camera; the invention of the Polaroid camera in 1947; the instamatic camera, which simplified the loading and taking of pictures, first appeared in 1963. Video cameras and recorders became widespread in the early 1980s and their price and weight has continued to fall since then; affordable digital cameras are a mid-1990s phenomenon. These inventions have facilitated the easy production of images. They have democratized image-making, stimulating a large vernacular practice – a middle-brow art (Bourdieu et al., 1990) – alongside the professional specialisms.

The documentary tradition of photography and film emerged in the late nineteenth century in Europe and America as a socially conscious endeavour to depict graphically the actualities of the world. Documentary has a rich and varied history. In the early decades of the twentieth century Lewis Hines' photographs of industrial working conditions influenced US reform movements and legislation. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) by James Agee and Walker Evans dramatically conveyed the personal costs of drought and the Depression on small farmers in 1930s America. In Europe, the pictures of Parisian street scenes and café life made

by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Brassai reached wide audiences (Westerbeck and Meyerowitz, 1994). At a time when television was still in its infancy, documentarists found a mass outlet for their work through the new and influential occupation of photo-journalism. That documentary found such a ready audience in the 1930s, in both Europe and America, has to be understood as part of wider social currents that showed a new sensitivity towards the description of the experiences of the ordinary person.

One of the first motion pictures ever produced showed workers leaving the Lumières' factory. The Lumières used their new invention to cast fresh light on aspects of daily life both at home and abroad; a primary function of cinematography was a documentary impulse to capture life *sur le vif* ('on the fly'). Indeed, they coined the term *documentaires* to describe their short travel films. Although Hollywood quickly exploited film for entertainment purposes, its capacity to document ways of life was not neglected. One milestone was Robert Flaherty's account of Eskimo life in *Nanook of the North* (1922). The ideological potential of documentary was rapidly recognized and exploited – in the Soviet Union, by *Kinopravda* (film truth) cinematographers, and in Nazi Germany, where Leni Riefenstahl's epic documentary of the 1934 Nazi Party national rally, *Triumph of the Will*, added new dimensions to the propaganda function of film.

It is customary to distinguish documentary from fictional work. Documentary is about reporting, not inventing, whatever is in the world. According to Michael Renov (1986; cited in Winston, 1995: 6), 'every documentary issues a "truth claim" of a sort, positing a relationship to history which exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterpart'. The realist impulse is paramount: documentary photographs and film aim to exhibit the facts of a situation. Documentary,

defies comment; it imposes its meaning. It confronts, us, the audience, with empirical evidence of such nature as to render dispute impossible and interpretation superfluous. All emphasis is on the evidence; the facts themselves speak ... since just the fact matters, it can be transmitted in any plausible medium ... The heart of documentary is not form or style or medium, but always content. (Stott, 1973: 14)

But documentary is also designed to encourage viewers to come to a particular conclusion about how the world is and the way it works, much as occurs in ethnographic texts. Documentary starts off by avowing merely descriptive concerns, 'telling it like it is'. As one distinguished exponent, Dorothea Lange, put it, 'documentary photography records the social scene of our time. It mirrors the present and documents for the future' (quoted in Ohm, 1980: 37). Routinely, however, these realist concerns of documentary are linked to persuasive ones, enjoining the viewer to take a particular attitude to what is

depicted. For example, John Grierson, the Scottish film-maker who is widely regarded as a pivotal figure in the development of British and North American documentary film in the 1930s and 1940s, considered cinema as a modernist pulpit. His approach was to exploit the observational potential of film in order to construct a picture of reality that would realize cinema's destiny as a social commentator and source of inspiration for social change (see Barnouw, 1974).

Documentary thus capitalizes upon photography's immense descriptive potential. Photographs provide a precise record of material reality, what is indubitably there in the world. This is the doctrine of photographic causality. Photography has been described as 'a benchmark of "pictorial fact"' (Snyder and Allen, [1975] 1982: 66) arising from the automatism of the process through which photographs are produced (by the machine-generated exposure of light to chemically treated paper). Photography seems to remove human agency from this process and yield a representation possessing an authenticity and objectivity that autographic forms (for example, easel painting) can never obtain. In John Berger's (1989: 96) summary, 'Photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote them.' The camera is, in the famous slogan, 'a mirror with a memory'. These are all powerful claims on behalf of photographic realism. But they do not support the more exaggerated affirmation that artifice is foreign to photography, nor do they support a hard and fast contrast between documentary (or scientific) and art photography. Art photography emerges around the recognition that photographs are not simply documents but are also aesthetic objects. As Susan Sontag (1978: 85) put it: 'nobody ever discovered ugliness through photographs. But many, through photographs, have discovered beauty.' Some of the issues at stake can be summarized in Table 21.2.

What Table 21.2 sets out are not two distinct types of photographic practice but rather two dimensions for appraising photographic images. Indeed, the most credible view to take is that documentary is defined by its use; documentary pictures are those which are used in documentary ways (Snyder, 1984). This also allows aesthetic considerations a place in documentary photography: a powerful image is often the most effective way of driving home the facts of some situations. The persuasiveness of documentary is achieved through the artful fusion of descriptive and aesthetic concerns: production decisions about pose, light, composition, lenses, types of film and focus, as well as editing judgements such as cropping and the like, are guided by the photographer's sense of what will make an effective image.

The realism of documentary is thus a professional ideology. In its most simple form it rests on two questionable assumptions: that the camera takes pictures and never lies, and that the camera

Table 21.2 *Conceptions of photographic practice*

Art photography	<i>versus</i>	Documentary photography
The photographer as seer		The photographer as witness
Photography as expression		Photography as reportage
Theories of imagination and conceptual truth		Theories of empirical truth
Affectivity		Information value
Symbolism		Realism

Source: Adapted from Sekula, 1975

faithfully records the world as it appears (Ruby, 1976). Against the first assumption it must be remembered that people, not cameras, take pictures and those pictures are always taken from some point of view that has an arbitrary component. Here 'arbitrary' does not mean happenchance; it means it could have been otherwise – another, different picture could easily have been made. Henri Cartier-Bresson famously spoke of waiting for the 'decisive moment' to create his arresting pictures of fugitive moments of Parisian life. The second assumption also cannot be accepted without qualification. Photographs do not unambiguously and transparently record reality. The sense we make of any photograph depends upon a variety of factors. Viewer-centred factors include our cultural and personal knowledge, and that elusive quality we call visual literacy. Text-centred factors include the location of the picture's publication and its title or caption or commentating text. Thus what the viewer actually sees in a photograph is profoundly shaped by language, its accompanying description (Price, 1994).

Ethnographic applications of both photography and film employ a broadly documentary approach. At present there is a notable asymmetry between anthropology and sociology. Visual anthropologists have overwhelmingly concentrated on the production and use of moving images (ethnographic films) while visual sociologists have been more at home with stills (photo-essays). Furthermore, sociologists have made nothing like the quantity of ethnographic film and photography produced by anthropologists. No doubt there are a number of reasons for the asymmetry, including the differing historical trajectories of the two parent disciplines and the differing place they accord ethnographic fieldwork. Anthropology has taken observation and description very much more seriously than sociology, which has tended towards the analytical and explanatory. It has been easier to justify the anthropological use of the camera because the discipline's traditional topic-matter is 'exotic' and because it is a discipline that is committed to exploring cultural difference. Sociology for much of its history has not only lacked these legitimations, it has been faced with the presence of non-sociological visual documentarists in the societies it studies. So why is there no body of sociological films corresponding to the

rich tradition built up over the course of a century in anthropology? In one respect this may be considered a production issue. Anthropological film can be seen as a technique originating in the Western academy that in its early years aimed to record facts about native life. Sociologists, however, stand in a different relation to their 'people'. The societies sociologists study offer specialist qualifications and careers in documentary film production. The would-be sociological film-maker has to compete with a technically proficient indigenous tradition. Anthropology may have its Jean Rouch but sociology has yet to find even its Henri Cartier-Bresson.

ORIGINS OF THE USE OF VISUAL METHODS IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ETHNOGRAPHY

The Torres Straits expedition of 1898, led by A.C. Haddon, was the first to use cinematography to record sociocultural arrangements. Modelled on natural history expeditions, Haddon's team sought to base its enquiries on direct contact with the islanders (Urry, 1972: 50). Equipped with a 35mm Newman and Guardia camera (Long and Laughren, 1993), they produced what is probably the first recognizably 'ethnographic' film, in contrast to film that could be put to ethnographic or ethnological purposes (such as Regnault's film made in 1895 of a Berber woman making a pot; Barnouw, 1974: 29). Only four and a half minutes of the fragile Torres Straits film still remain, depicting fire-making and ceremonial dances. These were scenes that were staged for the camera (Banks, 1998), a practice which was to become commonplace in subsequent ethnographic film.

The natural sciences furnished the broad intellectual temper of the team. As an integral part of their research they conducted a range of physiological and psychological tests, including Rivers' investigations into colour vision and perception, and Myers' studies of the sense of smell. The interest of Rivers, Myers and others in aspects of the physical capabilities and characteristics of people in what were then referred to as 'savage societies' had its roots firmly in physical anthropology. Indeed, as

soon as still photography was developed and the technology commercially available, physical anthropology started to employ it to advance its analytical concerns. In the late nineteenth century, influenced by pre-Darwinian evolutionist theories, physical anthropology and anthropometry made extensive use of photography to reveal the putative differences between the Mongol, Negro and Caucasian 'racial' groups. Guided by Huxley and Lamprey's attempts to systematize and record the physiological measurement of body mass and skeletal size in a manner that would enable reliable comparative morphometric data to be collected, anthropometric photography became established (Boas, 1974; Spencer, 1992).

Rivers, Haddon et al. recognized how important it was for professional anthropologists to collect their own data in the field,³ in contrast to the earlier practice of relying on the secondhand data collected incidentally by traders, missionaries, travellers, administrators and the like (Kuper, 1977). Radcliffe-Brown underscored the new departure that an ethnographically grounded anthropology marked, observing that 'Haddon urged the need of "intensive" studies of particular societies by systematic field studies of competent observers' (Kuper, 1977: 54). Since 1874 the British Association for the Advancement of Science's handbook, *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, had been used to assist and guide laypersons in the types and categories of information relevant to professional anthropologists. As Urry (1972: 51) observed, *Notes and Queries* evolved to the stage where it was 'not so much a guide for travellers as a manual of advice for more highly trained observers; a handbook for a new era of anthropological research to be based on more exact methods'. Indeed, by the time Malinowski went into the field equipped with a copy, *Notes and Queries* was in its fourth edition. Furthermore, Malinowski's fieldwork exemplar effectively relegated it to the second division of ethnographic method.

In significant part, the movement towards professional fieldwork practice occurred for the purpose of documenting forms of life that were rapidly changing or vanishing. This has been called 'salvage ethnography' (Clifford, 1987). Approximately contemporaneous to the Torres Straits expedition was the American Jesup North Pacific expedition, organized under Boas' direction while he was assistant curator in the department of anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History (Boas, 1974). The expedition resulted in more than seventeen published volumes, a copious collection of artifacts for the museum, photographs and later - film⁴ of the peoples of the Northwest Coast of America. In common with the Rivers and Haddon expedition, the visual record included illustrative reconstructions (Jacknis, 1984, 1992). Fifteen years after the Jesup expedition, Boas followed Curtis in photographing and filming

reconstructions of native behaviour and ceremonial, including a potlatch ceremony and dance, even himself posing in native attire (Curtis, 1915; Jacknis, 1992). Visually recorded reconstructions thus became an acceptable - indeed invaluable - addition to fieldwork reports.

Following the Torres Straits expedition, both Rivers and Haddon canvassed tirelessly for the widespread adoption within the emerging discipline of anthropology of what they referred to as 'fieldwork'.⁵ This concept was 'a term apparently derived from the discourse of field naturalists, which Haddon seems to have introduced into that of British anthropology' (Stocking, 1983: 80). For Rivers and Haddon fieldwork was a team enterprise, whereas post-Malinowskian fieldwork tended to be conducted by a solo researcher (or occasionally a man and woman partnership). Direct observation and enquiry into native beliefs and practices lay at its core. What fieldwork stands for - the close observation of a group's beliefs and practices that can be obtained only by prolonged immersion in its way of life - is now the staple of various styles of qualitative research.

Fieldwork is an essential constituent of the professional training of British social and American cultural anthropologists. At the centre of anthropology is comparative ethnographic study. To descriptively map human cultures became an implicit ultimate goal of anthropological ethnography, a residue of anthropology's association with the highly ambitious Victorian ethnological enterprise, which sought to fashion an all-inclusive historical explanation of humankind. Radcliffe-Brown and others made a great effort to distinguish the anthropological enterprise from a broader ethnology.⁶ Claiming positivistic science as a licence for the ethnographic enterprise, Radcliffe-Brown emphasized key methodological and theoretical issues. Ethnography, involving a substantial spell of fieldwork, became established as the distinctive activity of anthropologists. But this project was to be carried forward by Malinowski, not Radcliffe-Brown.

In part through his success as a self-publicist, Malinowski's ethnography has come to be treated as a watershed in professional anthropological fieldwork techniques. His Trobriand research (beginning with Malinowski, 1922) set the mould for anthropology as an empirical discipline. The modern idea of ethnographic research did not originate with Malinowski: it was his followers who disseminated this fieldwork validating myth (Stocking, 1983: 109). By the second half of the twentieth century, Malinowski had become so firmly established euhemeristically as the influential ancestor who pioneered fieldwork techniques that those who pointed him in that direction were often overlooked. Even if we accept Leach's quip that 'there was plenty of good ethnography long before Malinowski went to the Trobriands' (Leach, 1957: 120), it has become difficult to afford these earlier

researches the same significance. What distinguished Malinowski's ethnography was the time he devoted to it, and its quality: between one and two years in the field alongside the obligation to acquire competence in the native vernacular.

In common with Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski actively sought to establish the scientific credentials of an ethnographically based anthropology. Malinowski's approach proposed a practical merger of functional theory and fieldwork methods. This observational and ethnographic enterprise would produce 'objective' and 'naturalistic' social scientific descriptions that represented the 'native's point of view'.

Malinowski presented himself to his readers as 'striving after the objective, scientific view of things' (Malinowski, 1922: 6) and saw photography 'purely as a visual aid to his science' (Young, 1998: 13). Yet Malinowski's published ethnographies deploy considerable textual persuasion to convince the reader of their authoritative and realistic character (Geertz, 1988). His photographs helped to emphasize that his ethnography addressed the brute 'facts' of Trobriand life with a minimum of subjective construction and artifice. Young (1998: 5) observes that 'no other anthropologist of Malinowski's generation made photographs work so hard in the service of ethnographic narrative'. There is a high ratio of photographs to text. Malinowski's camera work results in a characteristic style. He eschewed close-ups and panoramas, preferring horizontally framed middle distance shots in which the camera matches the height of the subject. The photographs invariably include contextual cultural features and the same scene was often 'snapped' in quick succession from varying viewpoints (Young, 1998: 16-17).

As his posthumously published personal diaries make plain (Malinowski, 1967), the photographic construction of a visual record was a central element of his fieldwork practice. He frequently sought refuge in the technicalities of photographic practice to escape the vicissitudes and ennui of being in the field. One example:

1.25.18. Friday. Gusaweta. I cannot write the diary. Dissipation, I take up novel reading. Developing films and thinking aloud about a number of things. Radical longing only for E.R.M. - Intellectual and emotional turmoil abates. Exhaustion, headache. (Malinowski, 1967: 195-6)

Even a cursory review of Malinowski's published ethnographic reports on aspects of Trobriand life reveal that he made copious use of photography. For example, in *Argonauts* he employs some seventy-five photographs to display aspects of the culture. Malinowski also makes effective use of photographs to establish his ethnographic presence: several photographs show Malinowski and his equipment on Trobriand alongside Trobrianders.

At the core of Malinowski's use of photographs is the recourse he makes to their documentary character, an attribution that also aids the establishment of his ethnographic authority. While Malinowski's text describes Trobriand culture, his photographs have the power to authenticate the text. They appeal to what Sekula (1975) calls 'the myth of photographic truth', the apparent semantic autonomy of the photographic image. In the context of ethnographic monographs, photographs of fieldwork are generally treated as unmediated, mechanical transcriptions of the transparent facts.

Malinowski's ethnographic texts on Trobriand culture serve as a classical benchmark for what became the conventional ethnographic use of photography in fieldwork. Malinowski's published ethnographies used photographs as evidence of the following: photographs of persons, items of material culture with and without persons, symbolic items, unusual events such as rituals and ceremonies, commonplace activities, and culture as the embodiment of abstract theories (Ball, 1998b). A broadly similar range of categories was employed by those who followed Malinowski.

As Table 21.1 indicates, drawings, paintings and sketches are widely regarded as less realistic than photographs. Pinney draws attention to how 'pre-photographic representations always depend on the trustworthiness of the author/artist' (Pinney, 1997: 18). If ethnography had developed as a systematic research method prior to photography, then an earlier 'Malinowski' would have depended solely on such autographic images.⁷ Yet drawings and paintings have persisted in anthropological ethnographies. While forms of representation may be tied to types of society - photography and sociology are both documentary creatures of modernity - in actual ethnographic reports the photographic and the autographic have overlapped and mutually reinforced each other.

Historically, photography and film have occupied a much smaller place within sociological ethnography. When the sociological literature is examined for an equivalent fieldwork classic to place against Malinowski's *Argonauts*, then the disciplinary wisdom offers *Street Corner Society* (Whyte, 1943) as the best fit. Like Malinowski, Whyte also placed great store by the empirical, factual and naturalistic potential of fieldwork. Yet camera-generated data played no part in his investigation. This was true of the work of other notable sociological ethnographers. For example, Erving Goffman told his Shetland informants that he was working out of the Social Anthropology department at the University of Edinburgh and his Leica camera appears to have drawn their attention (Winkin, 1999), but visual data did not figure in the reports of his three major fieldwork-based studies (for Shetland see Goffman, 1953; for St Elizabeths, Goffman, 1961; for Las Vegas, Goffman, 1967).

Thus, photographs are far less common within sociological ethnographies. Indeed, if we search for a sociological classic which makes extensive use of photography, then the choices are few, but the Chicago School offers *The Hobo* (Anderson, 1923) as an example. *The Hobo* was a product of what Denzin (1995: 8) has termed interactionism's canonical phase. It includes some fourteen photographs. Perhaps more is at stake than the sheer 'familiarity' of those researched rendering photography redundant when carrying out fieldwork 'at home'. It also concerns the sociological researcher's conscious attempt to render both the research subjects and their location anonymous (Gold, 1989), an endeavour only rarely found in anthropological research.

Anderson's use of photographs followed a brief but significant episode in American sociology between 1896 and 1916, when the *American Journal of Sociology* published social problems-oriented articles that included photographs (Stasz, 1979). But with the exception of Thrasher's *The Gang* (Thrasher, 1927), few other Chicago works employed photographs. Thrasher's and Anderson's pictures now resemble documentary photographs: fascinating photographic studies that visually convey aspects of the ambience of the time. Viewed from a new century, their photographic subjects look every bit as exotic as Malinowski's Trobrianders. The neglect of visual data by sociological participant observers is founded in a preoccupation with the verbal elicitation of native points of view combined with a concern to protect subjects' anonymity.⁸ We now address a more fundamental epistemological issue, the marginalization of visual images in ethnographic texts.

A VISUAL FOUNDATION FOR ETHNOGRAPHY?

For ethnography, photographs alone do not inform; rather it is the analysis that the ethnographer is able to accomplish with these records of persons, places and activities (Schwartz, 1989). Ethnographies that include photographs inevitably and necessarily also employ written description. Mary Price's (1994: 5) proposal that for the interpretation of still photographs 'it is the act of describing that enables the act of seeing' is persuasive. This is evident in such exemplary studies as Bateson and Mead (1942) and Goffman (1979).

Balinese Character (Bateson and Mead, 1942) is an example of a post-Malinowskian problem-centred ethnography with a pointedly visual emphasis. Bateson and Mead were seeking to use visual methods to describe and analyse the 'ethos' of the Balinese, the cultural organization of their instincts and emotions. If Malinowski can be said to have established the conventional ethnographic

use of photography as an illustrative adjunct to anthropological ethnographic work, then Bateson and Mead opened up the potential of photography and film as both data repositories and analytical tools. Equipped with a theory relating ethos to personality development, Bateson and Mead amassed some 25,000 photographs and 22,000 feet of film. They worked as a team, Bateson filming and photographing while Mead took notes and interviewed. In the report of the research, *Balinese Character*, 759 photographs are thematically organized into a 100 'plates' with an accompanying text on the facing page. Bateson and Mead's work is innovative because it requires the reader to scrutinize still photographs alongside the written text to make sense of the analysis. In this way Bateson and Mead's book reveals elusive and intangible aspects of culture that hitherto the artist had better captured than the social scientist (Bateson and Mead, 1942: xi-xii). Their achievement was to show how still photographs, together with a descriptively precise and theoretically informed commentating text, can serve to illuminate and further ethnographic understanding. Bateson and Mead's skilful interweaving of text and photograph has led to its deserved valuation as an exemplar of visual analysis (Harper, 1989; Jacknis, 1988). Arguably, its long-run impact seems to have been more consequential for visual sociology than visual anthropology (Harper, 1994). Yet it has been an exemplar that has spawned few offspring.⁹

Gender Advertisements (Goffman, 1979), another exemplar of visual analysis, echoes elements of Bateson and Mead's method. Around 500 images are organized into a collection of categories and sub-categories, underpinned by a sophisticated theoretical framework. In encountering Goffman's text we are set puzzles to solve that involve looking as well as reading. Informed by Goffman's laconic commentary, the reader has to scan and sort to find the precise sense of the points that Goffman makes (Smith, 1996). While images cannot 'talk' for themselves but demand to be spoken for, Goffman's analysis draws more than most on the reader's active engagement with the text. What distinguishes Goffman's book from other analytic visual ethnographies, such as Whyte's (1980) notable use of timelapse photography to study sociability on urban streets, is the artful manner in which the success of the analysis depends upon the co-opting of the reader's visual literacy.

To characterize data as unable to 'talk' for itself is to employ a conversational trope. In the English language, for example, visualist tropes and metaphors are commonplace descriptive resources (Fernandez, 1986). Coulter and Parsons (1991) enumerate the diverse range of English verbs to describe forms of visual orientation. Language can be powerfully visualist in its representational function, so much so that linguistic modes can often substitute for visual modes of representation. The

logocentric bias this lends ethnography 'is the price that must be paid for making language do the work of the eyes' (Tyler, 1986: 137).

The communicative and interpretive dimensions of linguistic and visual representations are indexical (Garfinkel, 1967) and polysemic in character. This is not immediately obvious because photographs apparently yield 'fugitive testimony' to a fleeting moment; they seem 'to constitute a message without a code' (Barthes, 1977: 43). According to Barthes, rather than 'pure denotation', photographic images are 'floating chains of signifieds' that are anchored by linguistic messages.¹⁰ Sometimes, however, photographs can include information not mentioned by the ethnographer. They may contain an 'excess of meaning' that the ethnographer cannot control. Stored visual images are signs or communicative forms that depend upon other sign systems for their meaning. Hence the camera's value as an ethnographic tool is similar to the audio tape recorder: it provides an accurate trace of events that still leaves an enormous scope for analytic interpretation.

REALISM AND REPRESENTATION IN VISUAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Two decades after Becker's (1979: 7) observation that 'visual social science isn't something brand new ... but it might as well be', priorities have not changed substantially, although the visual dimension is beginning to occupy an established corner in ethnographic work. Visual ethnography is emerging as a distinct but diverse specialism. Like other domains of ethnographic work its realist assumptions have been assailed by a variety of critiques often lumped together as 'postmodern'. However, there has been no simple substitution of one for the other. Indeed, in many respects visual ethnographers have been quite resistant to the blandishments of postmodern theory, perhaps because their unusual mode of working has already sensitized them to the partial, artefactual, reflexive character of their enterprise (recall Bateson and Mead's (1942: xii) sensitivity to 'the steps by which workers in a new science solve piecemeal their problems of description and analysis' in acknowledging the experimental character of their investigation). A review of current ethnographic uses of film and photography shows that a variety of stances toward the vaunted 'crisis of representation' coexist.

The realist assumptions of the documentary tradition continue to inspire ethnographic uses of photography. Documentary's influence is evident, for example, in the ethnographically informed photo essays of Jon Rieger (1996) and Dona Schwartz (1997). Using photographs of rural and small-town American settings, Rieger (1996) considers the method of rephotographing the same site or persons

or activities and processes in order to study social change. Rieger suggests that while photographs can graphically exemplify change, it is often necessary to additionally use non-visual methods since some issues of evidence and inference can only be settled by drawing upon documentary or interview materials. Schwartz's study of the social organization of an American sporting spectacle, the 1992 Super Bowl, adopts the visual diary method (see also Prosser and Schwartz, 1998) and is presented from the point of view of an observer who enjoyed privileged access but who was not swept along by the domain assumptions of commercial photographers covering the event. Like commercial photography's coverage, Schwartz's pictures vividly convey the excitement and excess of the event. But unlike commercial photography, her pictures and purposefully interleaved text also address aspects of the political protests, hype, exploitation and backstage organization of this media-saturated phenomenon.

The analysis of indigenous uses of visual imagery was advanced by Sol Worth. Trained as a media professional, Worth modified the tradition that was established by Bateson and Mead, from a general visual anthropology to studies in visual communication (Worth, 1980). Worth encouraged the analysis of 'found' visual data (advertising, popular art forms etc.) rather than the researcher-generated kind. The emphasis on the analysis of indigenous imagery has stimulated ethnographic studies of the 'codes' informing professional photographic practices (Rosenblum, 1978; Schwartz, 1992). A different example of film serving as data is Worth and Adair's (1972) 'experiments' in indigenous image production with the Navajo. Working from a visual variant of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Worth and Adair equipped cinematically untrained Navajo with 16mm cameras. The films they produced enabled Worth and Adair to empirically investigate 'Navajo' ways of seeing that were manifest in what they filmed, how they used the equipment and the meaning they assigned to their images. Other notable studies of indigenous image production include Chalfen's (1987, 1998) ethnographies of home photography and movie-making. Developing the anthropology of visual communication approach pioneered by Worth, Chalfen submits that family photography can be characterized as a 'home mode' of communication, that is, images produced in the home for consumption in the home. Chalfen proposes a general descriptive framework consisting of 'communication events' (planning, shooting, editing, and exhibition events) that can be characterized in terms of five 'components' (participants, settings, topics, message form and code). Chalfen's framework provides a basis for ethnographic descriptions of the home mode of visual communication that encourages comparative analysis.

At roughly the same time, Collier (1967) (see also Collier and Collier, 1986) advocated photography

as a method of data collection, recommending its power to record material culture and to depict the physiognomy of social interaction (see Whyte, 1980 for a celebrated example). Collier also recommended its use within ethnographic interviews as a device to prompt and stimulate discussion ('photo elicitation'). In a noted study, Harper (1987) employed the technique to examine the work of an upstate New York mechanic, often spending two to four hours at a time eliciting the meanings of the photographs.

Indigenous imagery is also the topic of a branch of social studies of science that focuses on scientific uses of pictorial materials. Drawing on his own extensive research, Lynch outlines significant developments in natural scientific uses of visual materials (Lynch, 1998; Lynch and Woolgar, 1990). The study of scientific visual representations can be framed by studies of scientific work as text, discourse and practice. Hence there is an emphasis on the practical work involved in rendering 'scientific' matters accountable and seeable through visual devices.

This approach to 'scientific' ways of seeing overlaps with ethnomethodological studies of action in natural settings. In ethnomethodology visual and audio recordings that are rough by professional standards can serve as data for analysis (Bellman and Jules-Rosette, 1977; Garfinkel et al., 1981; Heath, 1986, 1997; Lebaron and Streeck, 1997). For example, Hindmarsh and Heath (1998) have analysed aspects of the visual and audio channels from a video recording of a brief strip of practical decision-making in a work organization, the Restoration Control Room of a telecommunications company. The analysis explores the unfolding of courses of action in time and space, and shows how the precise sense and relevance of computer displays and documents is constituted through participants' actions. Videotaped data permits close analysis of the local intelligibility of objects in an environment in which the visual intertwines with the spoken (Hindmarsh and Heath, 1998).

Visual ethnographers in anthropology, as already noted, tend to be concerned more with moving film and video while those affiliated to sociology generally concentrate on still photographic imagery. As Banks observes, 'until recently, visual anthropology was understood by many anthropologists to have a near-exclusive concern with the production and use of ethnographic film' (Banks, 1998: 9). Banks proposes a much broader notion of visual anthropology, a 'rethinking' that might include, for instance, the study of art, material culture, media studies and the like (Banks and Morphy, 1997). Nevertheless, the contrasting stills/movies orientations of visual sociology and visual anthropology continue to be reflected in the content of the current major specialist journals: *Visual Sociology*, *Visual Anthropology* and *Visual Anthropology Review*.

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw the establishment and institutionalization of the sub-discipline of visual anthropology.¹¹ There is now a market for ethnographic films. Many of these films seek to 're-present' in another medium themes drawn from conventional written ethnographic reports, using film to retell aspects of the ethnography (Crawford and Turton, 1992). While many ethnographic films are based upon a written report 'film brings people and cultures alive on the screen, capturing the sensation of living presence, in a way that neither words nor even still photos can' (Barbash and Taylor, 1997).

Ethnographic films can be considered a 'subset of documentary films more generally' (Loizos, 1993: 5). It is very difficult to establish hard and fast distinctions between ethnographic and documentary film. At the end of the twentieth century, Loizos' legitimation of ethnographic film is similar to Malinowski's much earlier claims for the ethnographic method: it fundamentally strives to fashion a 'realist', 'factual' account of social arrangements. But for Loizos the technology of photography can no longer be regarded as offering a simple guarantee. While the documentary style claims to furnish a more or less faithful record, as Loizos points out, 'there are dozens of filmic ways of creating a documentary "feel"' (Loizos, 1993: 5). *Cinema vérité* and *Direct Cinema* present some of the more arresting examples of this experimentation (Barnouw, 1974; Corner, 1996; Nichols, 1991; Renov, 1993; Stoller, 1992; Winston, 1995).

From the arrival of moving film, ethnographic film practice has been influenced by technical changes. These have included the replacement of highly flammable early film by more stable versions, the addition of a sound channel (first a separate task but, with the advent of 'synch-sound shooting' from around 1960, it became possible to shoot films solo) and the introduction of colour film and fast film that can be shot in low light conditions (Heider, 1976). Noting that 16mm film is relatively expensive, Henley (1989) anticipated salvation through 'the on-going video revolution'. The video 'revolution' has been so extensive, that it is not uncommon for film and video production to be treated as though they were the same (Rabiger, 1987 is representative of this approach). These changes have made the technical aspects of film-making simpler and easier: ordinary people can record the events once only accessible to trained film-makers. This offers new opportunities for collaboration and participation by the subjects of the film.

Academic disciplines are primarily 'disciplines of words' (Mead, 1995: 4), which has implications for the place and legitimacy of ethnographic film. The standard ethnographic product is a textual report and the ethnographic film is fundamentally a

second order construct. Ethnographic films are thus based upon the framework of a written ethnographic report, extracted themes from it serving as a basis of the film's storyline. Loizos (1993) and Chiozzi (1989) make this point, although they also maintain that film can be used for constructive purposes different in character from text. A common asymmetry in the assessment of ethnographic film is for the anthropologist to concentrate upon the accuracy of the anthropological content and to treat the filmic and aesthetic components as secondary. As Henley assures us, in a consideration of the relationship of film to text, 'Film-making is simply an alternative means of representing certain aspects of social reality, which in certain contexts may be more effective than writing a text but which in others, is certainly less effective' (Henley, 1998: 55).

Ethnographic films have often resulted from collaboration between an anthropologist and a film-maker. David Turton, who had a highly successful working relationship with the film-maker Leslie Woodhead, is a good example of such collaboration. They made a collection of films for the *Disappearing World* series that explored cultural aspects of the East African Mursi and Kwegu peoples (Singer and Woodhead, 1988; Turton, 1992; Woodhead, 1987). While such collaborations have served a generation of anthropologists and film-makers, they are fraught with potential tensions and difficulties (see Barbash and Taylor, 1997: 74-84). For Henley (1989) and others the ideal is for the anthropologist to simultaneously also serve as the film-maker. Dan Marks' 1992 film *My Crazy Life* (shown in the BBC *Fine Cut* series), which deals with gang warfare, is a case in point. Video technology, which simplifies some of the technical aspects of film-making, assists the realization of this ideal. In Britain a number of television series devoted to making and showing anthropological films have received much critical acclaim, including Granada's *Disappearing World* and the BBC's *Worlds Apart* and *Under the Sun*. The licensing of British terrestrial television stations demanded a compulsory educational element (a practice that started with the BBC). This demand has ensured a budget for the production of informed, high quality programmes. In other parts of the world public service broadcasting and the emergence of specialist television channels seems to ensure a niche market for ethnographic film.

Technical aspects of film-making are a prominent part of the literature on ethnographic film (Devereaux and Hillman, 1995; Hockings, 1995; Hockings and Omori, 1988; Loizos, 1993; Rollwagen, 1988). There is frequently a close correspondence between the topic-matters of written ethnographic reports and those of ethnographic films. Indeed, many of the classical written ethnographies have had ethnographic films made about

photogenic themes within them. For instance, several of the films about Trobriand (each of them made after Malinowski's death) are haunted at every turn by his ethnography. Notable among them is Powell's film *The Trobriand Islanders* (1951), which was made after a period of fieldwork and which illustrates aspects of mythology, garden magic and Kula exchange. More recently, Weiner brought a women's perspective to bear on Trobriand culture, and a *Disappearing World* film was based around her research (*The Trobrianders of Papua New Guinea*, 1990; Weiner, 1988). There have also been films based around other classic ethnographies, such as Evans-Pritchard's studies of the Nuer and Azande (Heider, 1976; Singer and Woodhead, 1988).

Two relatively distinct sets of questions can be identified in debates around realism and representation in visual ethnography. The more conventional critique of documentary complains that what has been captured is a rehearsed construction rather than naturally occurring actuality. Prior to a photograph or moving film being taken, a scene has been 'set up'. A classic example cited in the literature is Andrew Gardner and colleagues' photographs of the aftermath of the Battle of Gettysburg in the American Civil War. Here it seems that the same corpse was dressed up in the uniforms of first one side and then the other, positioned appropriately, and photographed (Fulton, 1988). This pro-filmic event must be regarded differently from other decisions made immediately prior to the instant of picture-taking, such as the selection of the angle of the shot, the lighting, lens, film type and so forth. Artifice can also be constructed *after* the photograph or moving film has made its record. The alteration that is possible at this stage depends on the technology, ranging from tampering with negatives in early photography and film, to digitally modifying an image to produce something that is akin to a collage (Chaplin, 1998). A classic example of tampering with an image after it has been recorded is the Russian revolution photograph of Lenin engaging in public oratory with, in the original, comrade Trotsky close by - a position from which he was removed in the versions of the photograph endorsed by Stalin (see Wyndham and King, 1972: 151). While it is widely known that photographs can be faked in these ways, this knowledge does little to shake our belief in the photograph as evidence.

The critique associated with postmodern theory (though having diverse sources and containing some ideas that would not have been foreign to Max Weber) suggests that cultural description of any kind is a good deal more complex and political than envisaged by conventional accounts of fieldwork practice and ethnographic film-making. Attempts to establish a definitive set of criteria of ethnographic adequacy of film, such as Heider's (1976) fourteen

variables, are regarded as a set of scientific 'dicta' that are rarely if ever realized fully in practice (Weinberger, 1994). Why should long takes and 'whole bodies' be preferred as universally yielding full representations of social activities? Others, such as the MacDougalls, have challenged the single authorial voice of conventional ethnographic film and its politics and ethics of representation by incorporating dialogic formats into the films they have produced. When organized thus ethnographic film 'can be read as a compound work, representing a crossing of cultural perspectives' (MacDougall, 1994: 55) that does not re-tell extant anthropological knowledge but rather provokes the discovery of new knowledge through its making. In this conception, the professional anthropologist's knowledge is simply another narrative with no privileged status.

These critiques draw attention to important features of the production and consumption of ethnographic film: the film-maker's purpose or 'intention', the making of the product or 'event', through to the way it is received, the audience 'reaction' (Banks, 1992). These categories allow the scope of the debates about realism to be expanded. In particular they give attention to the role of the audience in the reception of the text.

A difficulty with earlier debates about photographic realism and the evidentiary status of the photograph and film is their tendency to focus on the process and circumstances of image production while omitting to give commensurate attention to viewers' and audiences' interpretations of the image. Brian Winston (1998: 66) proposes 'moving the legitimacy of the realist image from *representation* – the screen or the print – where nothing can be guaranteed to *reception* – by the audience or the viewer where nothing need be guaranteed'. In this view photography ceases to be a reflection of the world's properties. Photography's authenticity or truthfulness comes to be assessed in relation to our commonsense understanding of the world and the other kinds of evidence available to us about what is depicted.

This conception of image interpretation does not give sovereign interpretive authority to the viewer, as some versions of postmodernism seem to aver. Rather, it places great store by the overworked but none the less essential notion of context. Once an image has been recorded and placed in the public domain, it is then open to all manner of interpretation, for as Becker has argued, 'Photographs get meaning, like all cultural objects, from their context' (Becker, [1995] 1998: 88). Withholding information about context is a device often used by art photographers to lend an air of mystery to their work. Providing contextual detail – the stuff of all good ethnography – is what is needed to make images intelligible.

CONCLUSION: THE WORK OF ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL REPRODUCTION

We conclude with a discussion of recent and ongoing technical developments and sketch some of their possibilities for visual analysis in ethnography. New digital technologies herald the end of photography's dependence upon chemical and mechanical processes and thus seem to decisively undermine the 'pencil of nature' (Fox Talbot)/ 'stencil off the real' (Sontag) realist claims traditionally associated with photographic representation. In certain respects, the 'digital revolution' looks set to extend the realms of the hyperreal at realism's expense. Digitalization is a process through which a picture is divided in a grid into small elements ('pixels'). Each pixel is assigned a number from a code of colours or brightness. By changing the values of the pixels or removing them, a photograph can be readily and seamlessly slightly modified or drastically transformed. As the popular press nowadays often shows us, persons who could not possibly have met can be depicted in a seamless photograph. Movies now contain shots constructed as simulations from angles that no human cameraperson would be capable of filming, affording perspectives that once could only be imagined. The production of mass-mediated images is coming to be more a matter of computing proficiency than camera, darkroom or editing skills. Digitalization techniques seem to permit an unprecedented enhancement and manipulation of pictorial representations.

These changes strike at the heart of the notion of photographic causality and the easy conceptions of realism it supports, severing the necessary tie between photographs and their referents. Digitalization finally puts an end to documentary's 'innocent arrogance of objective fact' by 'removing its claim on the real' (Winston, 1995: 259). When placed alongside such cognate developments as multimedia applications, the growth of the Internet, the emergence of large electronic data banks and virtual reality technologies, these changes lead some to suggest that the 'post-photographic' age has arrived.

Some consider the changes thus signalled to be as momentous as those postulated by Benjamin's ([1936] 1973) classic essay. Digitalization can promote the emergence of new forms of pictorial representation, for example the pop video that exemplifies such key postmodern themes as collage, heterogeneity, pastiche and fragmentation. While there is a basis for claiming that digitalization might provide new grounds for perception, claims about the death of photography need to be treated more circumspectly. Such claims rest on an oversimple technological determinism and overlook the

dependence of the new technologies on older skills, knowledges and ways of seeing. Continuities always co-exist with technologically driven ruptures. Moreover, the 'postmodern' world is increasingly hybrid or intertextual in character, where all kinds of borrowing and pastiche are permissible (Lister, 1997). The more portentous claims about a post-photographic era are probably premature. Claims about photographic realism have always been properly understood in qualified terms: 'seeing is believing' is an adage that has long been ironically framed. Digitalization now renders claims about, for example, documentary realism, transparently ideological – it 'destroys the photographic image as evidence of anything except the process of digitisation [*sic*]' (Winston, 1995: 259). One may gloomily prognosticate that digitalization may be regarded as just another symptom of what Baudrillard has termed 'the triumph of signifying culture'.

Such developments might seem to run the risk of pushing ethnographers' productions even further in the direction of – in a pejorative construal that buys into simple conceptions of realism – 'fictions'. New technologies may readily offer the opportunity for misrepresentation but they may just as easily enhance the possibilities for 'adequate' representation. As always, the key issues lie to either side of the technology and concern how the new technologies are used for ethnographic purposes. We incline to the more optimistic view that new technologies can offer ethnographers tools to sharpen their visual perception. We end this chapter with a brief survey of studies suggestive of such ethnographic potential.

Digitalization's implications help to shift attention away from the putatively distinctive characteristics of the photographic representation towards the reception and interpretation of these images. In an intriguing reconsideration of the 1942 classic *Balinese Character*, Dianne Hagaman (1995) has argued that digitalization and related computer-based multimedia technologies would have considerably aided Bateson and Mead's research process and product. Computers could efficiently handle many of their data management and analysis problems. For example, photographs could be scanned into computer files that would also permit their ready storage, retrieval and comparison. Images could be readily exchanged with colleagues at the analysis stage. Devices like hypertext links could aid Bateson and Mead's presentation by more effectively cross-referencing their images. Film sequences could also be integrated into the presentation of stills. Hagaman's mental experiment suggests ways in which the computer can facilitate the combination and recombination of pictorial and written textual representations, and thus encourage shifts in thinking and the emergence of new visual literacies (see also Chaplin, 1998 for comments on how

information technologies can assist constructionist approaches).

The new technology also offers tools for the more precise collection and analysis of dynamic visual media such as television news. Priest (1998) shows the usefulness of one software program for capturing and viewing video clips, comparing and categorizing the clips, creating stills and transcribing the soundtrack. For presentational purposes the hypertext link, which can provide a direct link from a point in the author's written text to one image or collection of images, has much to recommend it over paper-based alternatives of search-and-look (see Jewitt's (1997) study of images of men for one example and Thoutenhoofd's (1998) examination of the culturally distinct visuality of deaf communities for another). Here electronic journals have led the way. There are other multi-media possibilities. It is already possible to insert videoclips into the published report (e.g. McGettigan, 1998) and even to include transcripts of the soundtrack in the text adjacent to the videoclip (e.g. Lomax and Casey, 1998). It does seem that there are real benefits for presenting ethnographic work in a far more vivid fashion than ever before (Slack, 1998). New forms of reader and viewer engagement with the ethnographic text are emerging. On the other hand, there is evidently a risk of technological determination parallel to the worries about intellectual convergence and stultification that may follow the widespread adoption of qualitative packages (Coffey et al., 1996; Lee and Fielding, 1996).

Our discussion of contemporary ethnographic uses of photography and film are diagrammatically summarized in Figure 21.1.

We trust that this chapter has signposted some of the opportunities for ethnographers that photography and film potentially offer. Visual methods have been utilized in ethnography almost since the inception of anthropology and sociology. With certain notable exceptions, that use has been primarily illustrative rather than analytical – to amend Ruby's remark, visual methods have only rarely been considered a way of *doing* ethnography. The chapter has traced the uses of visual methods and reviewed directions taken by the work of ethnographers interested in the medium. The greater use of visual methods is not a panacea for all of ethnography's ills nor is it the touchstone to startling ethnographic discoveries. These methods may, nevertheless, go some way towards countering ethnography's logocentric bias, allowing eyes to do the work so often assumed by language in ethnographic accounts. Lastly, it needs to be remembered that when doing fieldwork, ethnographers engage all of their senses, of which vision is but one (the observational metaphor). This chapter, then, might be read as a review of and plea for (to coin a phrase) CSEW – Camera-Supported Ethnographic Work.¹²

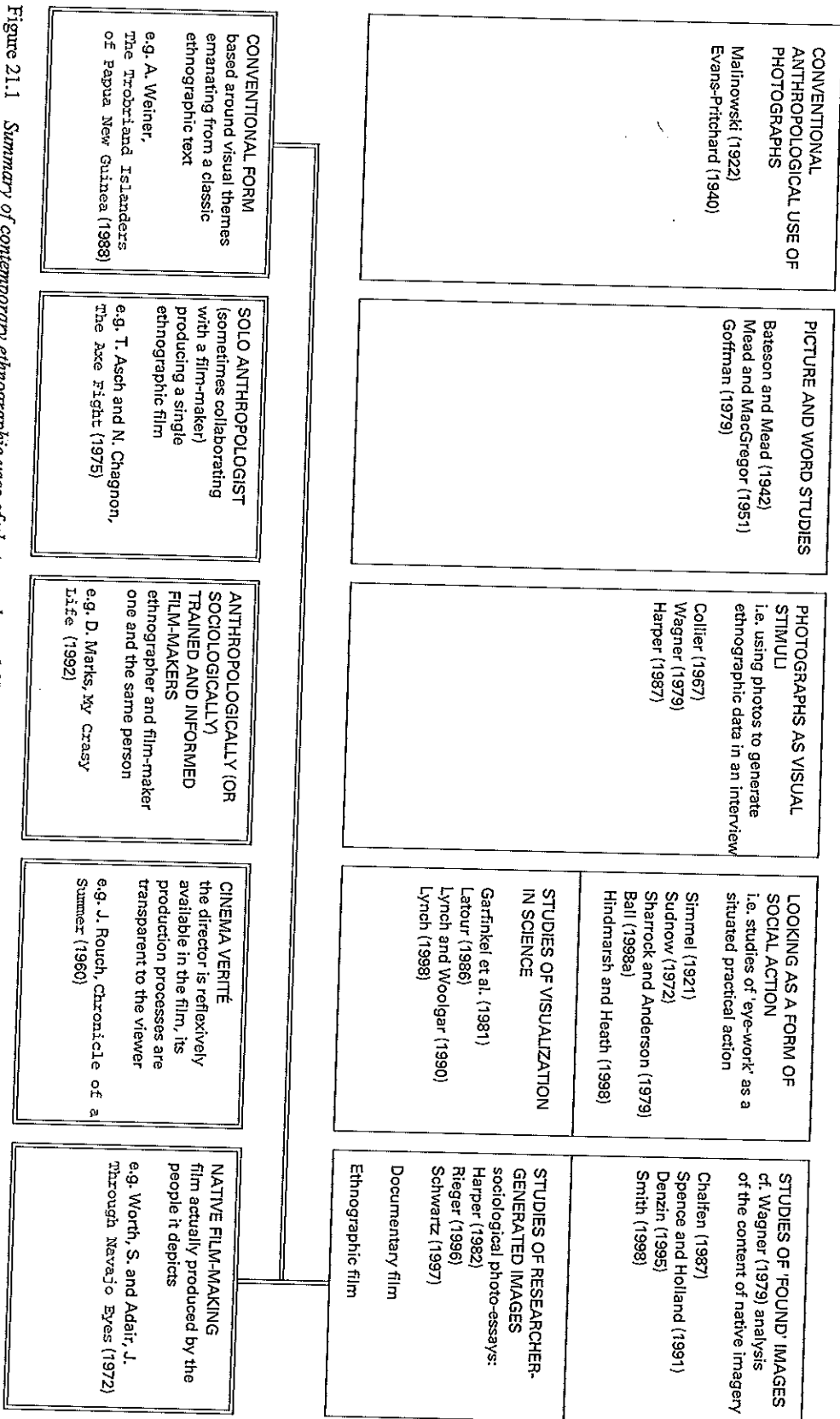


Figure 21.1 Summary of contemporary ethnographic uses of photography and film

NOTES

1 We do not wish to get caught up in debates about the meaning, defining orientations and limits of visual sociology and visual anthropology. While most work in these sub-areas has concentrated on the use of photography and film, other kinds of visual record are not precluded (cf. Grady, 1996). As *images* appear to be at the centre of both sub-areas, there is much to recommend Prosser's (1996, 1998) 'image-based qualitative methodology' if an ethnographic generic is sought.

2 Chaplin's book and Harper's chapter address implications of the cultural turn for visual sociology. Henney gives a historical account and annotated bibliography of the development of visual sociology up to the mid-1980s. Ball and Smith review ethnographic methods for the analysis of visuality. Grady provides a judicious analysis of the scope of visual sociology.

3 The Torres Straits expedition resulted in some five published volumes of detailed information, the collection of over 2,000 cultural artifacts, film and photographs (Haddon, 1901).

4 Jay Ruby (1980) suggests that Boas' use of still photography in the field dates from 1894 while his use of motion picture cameras came much later (around 1930). Nevertheless, the significance of Boas cannot be underestimated:

it is not an overstatement to suggest that Franz Boas should be regarded as a father figure in visual anthropology. He is at least partially responsible for making picture-taking a normative part of the anthropologist's field experience - a characteristic which has distinguished us from other students of the human condition. (Ruby, 1980: 6)

5 The early fieldwork of Rivers and Haddon et al. was not exclusively qualitative in orientation. It included various forms of quantification, survey work and the experimental method.

6 As he wrote in 1931, when the separation from ethnology was still not healed, and the Durkheimian influence on his thinking was powerful:

The progress of our studies required that they be separated, and this separation has been taking place during the last four decades. Out of social anthropology there has grown a study which I am going to speak of as comparative sociology. (Radcliffe-Brown, 1958: 55)

7 Indeed, it was common for general anthropological work prior to Malinowski to contain an abundance of images such as drawings and sketches. For example, E.B. Tylor's classic text of 1881, *Anthropology*, includes some seventy-eight illustrative figures, mainly sketches of people and items of material culture. Later work, such as that of Malinowski's student Evans-Pritchard, also contains sketches of persons and items of material culture, alongside a substantial corpus of photographs (Evans-Pritchard, 1940).

8 Anonymizing the people studied also featured in the anthropology of Europe from its modern beginning in the 1950s. Misgivings about the practice have emerged more

recently and over the past decade or so the practice has fallen into disuse.

9 Indirectly this bears testimony to the immense amount of fieldwork and deskwork that went into the study: as Harper (1994: 404) observes, 'There have been no visual ethnographies that equal *Balinese Character* in depth or comprehensiveness.' Anthropologists have increasingly preferred the medium of film while systematic sociological interest in visual analysis is thinner and more recent (dating from the late 1960s). Mead went on to produce a similar study concentrating on childhood development (Mead and MacGregor, 1951), but otherwise there have been few attempts to follow the opening. Goffman's (1979) *Gender Advertisements* is probably the closest that academic sociology has come to rivalling *Balinese Character*. Bateson and Mead set the exemplar; an opportunity still exists to develop a tradition of work.

10 Semiology has spawned a number of investigations of visual imagery, particularly when refracted through the concerns of cultural studies (see Burnett, 1995; Evans and Hall, 1999; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996 for significant reviews and recent developments).

11 Perhaps best known is the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester in the UK and the Center for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California in the United States.

12 In coining this usage, we borrow from the established field of Computer-Supported Co-operative Work (CSCW) that investigates ways of working with computing technologies. Just as in CSCW there is a clear resistance to simple forms of technological determinism that downgrade the practicalities of the diverse ways that computers can be used, so too CSEW might profit from retaining a recognition of the centrality of context for the interpretation of camera-generated images. As Benjamin recognized in 1936, the camera has an enormous potential as a tool of perception. The photographer:

increases insight into the necessities that govern our existence, by using close-ups from the environment, by emphasizing hidden details ... by investigating banal milieus while directing his lens in an inspired manner, he manages ... to ensure for us a massive and undreamed of latitude. We seem to be hopelessly encircled by our pubs, our city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railway stations and factories. Then came the film and blew-up our prison world with the dynamite of tenths of a second, so that we now casually undertake adventurous journeys among its widely scattered ruins. It thus becomes obvious that a different nature speaks to the camera from the one that speaks to the eye. (Benjamin, 'Work of art ...', as translated from the German by Joel Snyder; quoted Snyder, 1989: 171)

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