

Methods at Manchester

Using Film in Ethnographic Field Research

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Different uses of cameras in field research:

- A tool to document reality
 - An objective device to record data
 - An illustration of pre-conceived arguments
 - To practice salvage anthropology
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- As a tool for exploring reality
 - A means to elicit information
 - As an instrument that provokes performance
 - A way to explore how other people view their world

Origins

- Late 19th Century

The invention of movie cameras and the invention of anthropology as a discipline

- . 1895 Félix-Louis Regnault filmed a Wolof woman making ceramic pots at the Exposition Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale in Paris
- . 1898 Alfred Cort Haddon - Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits.

1920s

- Anthropology went through a shift in interest from observable evidence of culture to more abstract aspects of social life. The movie camera was forsaken.
- Documentary films were just beginning to bloom:
1922: Robert Flaherty, NANOOK OF THE NORTH



- 1925: Merian C. Cooper and E.B. Schoedsack, GRASS

1930s

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson



- Camera as a neutral tool for anthropological research and Representation.
- The ideal 360° camera
- Science vs Art
- Illustration of a theory

1950s, 60s...

Jean Rouch and Cinéma-vérité

- Improvised, collaborative and reflexive
- Truth provoked by the camera
- Truth performed by the protagonists
- Truth achieved by people's reenactment of their own lives and their own memories.



Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in the final scene of Chronicle of a Summer

- The truth of the cinema and not that of an objective reality that is out there ready to be apprehended.

1970s, 80s...

Observational Cinema (David MacDougall)

- Camera emulates the anthropological principles of participant observation
- The action unfolding in front of the camera, revealing, by showing and not telling, a specific truth about a specific people
- Camera position is unprivileged
- Reflexivity and elicitation are results of the anthropologist being there with the camera and not a means to a deeper truth as in Rouch's cinéma-vérité.
- Reality unfolds as one films, making the camera a crucial tool in the process of understanding.

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