

REVIEWS

Paradigm for Looking: Cross-Cultural Research with Visual Media, by Beryl L. Bellman and Bennetta Jules-Rosette. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing, 1977. 211 pp. npl.

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This book carries the burden of an inflated title. The reader expects an inquiry in philosophical anthropology: a broadly conceived work with implications for epistemology, the theory of knowledge, and cognitive psychology. Post-Kuhnian connotations of 'paradigm' combine with seductive dust-jacket promises to support this expectation. Consequently, the reader feels shortchanged when the authors deliver a set of very limited observations filtered through a screen of extreme ethnomethodological reticence. Bellman and Jules-Rosette may also be victims of the commodification of scholarship. But, a more accurate, if less marketable, title would have been, "Informant Use of Film and Video-Tape in Participant-Observation: An Exploratory Study."

Bellman and Jules-Rosette do deliver the goods suggested by *that* title. They give a good accounting of their use of visual media in field work situations in Central and West Africa. They provide a detailed set of guidelines for others to emulate. And, they offer two very convincing briefs for the use of video equipment by informants in participant-observation: (1) it focuses researchers attention on aspects of interaction which otherwise go unnoticed; and (2) it allows for informant feedback at a much earlier stage in the research process than other methods.

These advantages clearly justify Bellman and Jules-Rosette's enthusiasm. They could have provided a resource for a powerful monograph. Stretched into a book, they provide a little thin and require padding. Thus, Bellman and Jules-Rosette's criticism of Edmund Leach's apology for including field work data in one of his studies may be a diversionary tactic. Much of the data Bellman and Jules-Rosette include in their study is padding. It consists of shorthand descriptions of film action accompanied by identification of "cademic markers" (what is being done with the camera: panning, zooming, tilt, follow shots, dolly). A brief sample would have been welcome. Accompanied by the films, all of it might be useful. Standing alone, it is of little value.

Like Leach, but unlike Bellman and Jules-Rosette, I am interested in discovering the "principles behind the facts." Thus, I wonder what a Malinowski, Benedict, Whorf or Herskovits would have done with Bellman and Jules-Rosette's materials. And, I question whether methodological reflexivity has to foreshorten conceptual horizons. Bellman and Jules-Rosette acknowledge that their approach cannot secure 'objectivity': "Neither, on the one hand, do we claim that analysis should be based solely on interpretive procedures (although introspection contributes to the analysis) . . . nor,

on the other hand, do we argue for the positivist hope that wholly 'objective' procedures can be found that would be used to analyze any interactional data" (p. 20). But, this epistemological bind can also be re-interpreted as a warrant—even a license—to launch a more significant genre of inquiry. Inquiry with the sort of humanistic sweep and vision that made possible the classic traditions in social science! Such inquiry may require a new rhetoric or stylistic structure. We may need to divide our accounts into frames in which we alternate acknowledgements of methodological insecurity with others in which we make daring, even speculative, cognitive leaps which are plausible if not firmly demonstrable. Surely a convention can be devised whereby departures from strict inferential logic can be marked by a suitable identifier—perhaps a contrasting typeface. Without such cognitive leaps, Marx's theory of ideology, Weber's 'Protestant ethic', Freud's psychoanalytic theory, or Foucault's 'archaeology of knowledge' could not have been articulated. None of these are demonstrable, all are clearly valuable—far more valuable than the epistemological asceticism produced by rigid adherence to ethnomethods.

Bellman and Jules-Rosette divorce their work from the large and impressive literature that is available on cross-cultural perceptual research:

Experimental studies have demonstrated the influence of environment and learning in perception. For the most part, these studies have concentrated on the perception of depth, contour, and color and have been less concerned with motion (Segall, Campbell, and Herskovits, 1966 . . .). Discussing some of these experimental findings with regard to film is almost tautological, since the film image is itself a visual trick created by the rapid movement of still frames across an alternately light and dark screen. Furthermore, except by inference, these findings have not provided basic descriptions of perception and attention in natural settings (p. 9).

This decision cuts them off from insights (based upon experiments in ethnographic settings) that could greatly enrich their own accounting procedures. For example, in attempting to account for "the influence of environment and learning on perception," Bellman and Jules-Rosette give us rudimentary biographical sketches of the informants noting their education and previous exposure, if any, to electronic media. In comparison, consider the suggestion from the irrelevant work of Herskovits, Segall, and Campbell, who stress the importance of examining the details of the visual environment of groups being studied:

Such details include the typical form of houses, the maximum distance at which objects are typically viewed, whether or not vistas over land or water occur, typical games, skills, artistic training, and other aspects of culture that might affect habits of inference In the carpentered Western world such a great proportion of artifacts are rectangular that the habit of interpreting obtuse and acute angles as rectangular surfaces extended in space is a very useful one In a culture where rectangles did not dominate, this habit might be absent . . . etc. (Herskovits et al, 1956: 2-5).

The frustrating thing is that Bellman and Jules-Rosette undoubtedly know a lot more than the rest of us about the social bases of perception but because, as they put it, "We saw ourselves in danger of constructing what Garfinkel and Sacks called 'anthropological quotes' (p. 19); they refuse to share

it with us. Instead of contributing to the 'sociology of perception' (c.f. Arthur Child); they offer us 'recipe knowledge' (c.f. Alfred Schutz) for cross-cultural media analysis:

Academic markers are second-order analytical devices since they are themselves the products of an analysis. Although we differed in particular ways in our location of markers, we make the following recommendations for anyone attempting to employ our concepts:

1. Make a transcript of the content of the production.
2. Then, make a transcript of all camera techniques and movements without seriously attending to what is occurring in the production.
3. Discover which techniques found in the second step appear to be associated with events that were located in the first step.
4. Record which techniques were used by the cameraperson as responses to his interaction with the event (e.g. dollyng or moving away from the action as it moves in on him).
5. Record which techniques were used to posit acts embedded within events (e.g. in the Sande dance tape the cameraperson pointed out the entrance of the male priests or Zo into the ritual area by slightly tilting the camera up and narrating what was occurring into the microscope).
6. Record, which techniques were used to terminate an event (e.g. shutting off the camera, fast pans away from the previous action, down tilts, and fast dollys to new locations).
7. Record which techniques were used in variation with other techniques. Note what was occurring in the event to discover if the difference was the result of the cameraperson's reactions to some action (e.g. the Poro priest's use of zoom rather than dolly when the Sande priestess danced with a medicine bundle on her head).
8. Keep a note book on all decisions made throughout the analysis and explicate reasons for the choices made.

This is a useful recipe: one that merits a permanent place in the files of anyone who intends to do research with film or video-tape. But a recipe is not a paradigm. It has little to contribute to the tradition of epistemological studies in anthropology: a tradition which recommends that reports on cultural differences make explicit the cultural commonalities which provide the contextual anchoring of differences (Northrop and Livingston, 1964).

Bellman and Jules-Rosette document differences in media use by informants and researchers (two American sociology students, Chris and Peter) in the same situation. They find filming as an order of reality differed for informants and researchers; the choice of shots was different; conceptions of social events differed; filming behavior contrasted; visual repertoires of informants and researchers differed sharply; and use of film language and technique varied. Their sample is very small (a handful of informants and two student-researchers). Herskovits et al. (1956) explorations of cross-cultural differences in the perception of optical illusions was based on over 2,000 cases.

The intrusive properties of the camera itself cannot be ignored. Bellman and Jules-Rosette acknowledge Carpenter's assertion that media tend to destroy traditional culture. But, they diminish his claim, "Our research suggests that such changes are by no means universal in their extent or direction". Rather, they contend, "media are the servants of accepted forms of communicative forms rather than their masters" (p. 199). The data indicate that informant camera techniques respect the *meni* of palavers and rituals

(community definitions of situations). But, the American visual productions tend to violate *meni* in an attempt to simulate participants' perspectives:

... the upward tilt and panning to follow action that Peter used was a product of effort to preserve his orientation to the ritual and calculated use of the camera. Nevertheless, Peter's use of the camera proxemically constituted a challenge to the preacher. Filming upward resembled looking upward from the seated position directly into the preacher's face. The contradiction is that the lower status or seated position is expected to look down as a sign of deference (p. 196).

In time, we are told, informants began to emulate researchers' film techniques. If Pat Loud's testimony on how features of community organization are highlighted by the presence of a camera merits consideration (163); then, I think Jeremy Tunstall's thesis that "the media are American" also warrants attention (Tunstall, 1977). Tunstall focuses on technological constituents of media use not content. He contends that the camera presupposes (or imposes) an egalitarian ethos: it requires violation of the proxemic conventions of hierarchical traditions. It assumes that the camera-person cannot only meet the gaze of a tribal elder but that the camera can dissect the elder's perspective from privileged vantage points. If Tunstall is correct—and I think he is—then, the very presence of the camera violates the integrity of the situation Bellman and Jules-Rosette so conscientiously strive to preserve in their decision to use in-film editing. In attempting to escape the methodological imperialism of positivism, they may have become unwitting agents of cultural imperialism. Informant visual productions ("visual tricks") may only project refracted after-images of the *kwii* (Western/modern) culture Bellman and Jules-Rosette import.

The critical tenor of parts of this review should not eclipse Bellman and Jules-Rosette's achievement. They have expanded the repertoire of qualitative methods in human studies. Very few researchers can claim this distinction.

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This is a book about creativity. It was written by a psychiatrist who is research director at the Austen Riggs Center. The purposes of the book are to