

Notes on the History and Development of Visual Research Methods¹

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Precursors of interpretive visual analysis

The rich, varied, and prolific body of research using visual data has made it a virtually impossible task to trace the complete development of visual methods in the social sciences. Particularly in the past few years, we have witnessed a vibrant intensification in the field of visual sociology and in visual research methods.² In order to understand the current state of

1 This article is based on a paper given at the conference SIAVTAC in Mexico City in 2008, first published in 2011 as »Apuntes sobre la historia y el desarrollo de los métodos visuales« in a book edited by César A. Cisneros (*Análisis cualitativo asistido por computadora. Teoría e Investigación*, 165–191). I draw partly on previous publications, some of them jointly written with colleagues that generously allowed me to use our collaborative efforts (Pötzsch and Schnettler 2007; Schnettler 2007; Schnettler and Raab 2008; Schnettler and Baer 2013). I am grateful to Alejandro Baer and Hubert Knoblauch and two anonymous reviewers for their critical comments.

2 This revival is well documented in a number of monographs (Raab 2008; Bohnsack 2009; Breckner 2010), introductory books (Moritz 2011; Dinkelacker and Herrle 2009; Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010; Reichertz and Engler 2011), collections (Kissmann 2009; Corsten, Krug, and Moritz 2010; Pink 2012; Lucht, Schmidt, and Tuma 2013) and handbooks (Margolis and Pauwels 2011; Rose 2011). Several journals have published thematic issues on visual sociology, including *Sozialer Sinn* (vol. 8, no. 2, 2007); *FQS* (vol. 9, no. 3, 2008); *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (vol. 37, no. 2, 2012); and *Soziale Welt* (vol. 64, no. 1–2, 2013). Moreover, the ISA Thematic Group on Visual Sociology, established in 2009, has recently been elevated to the status of a Working Group (WG03).

both, it seems necessary to recapitulate at least the major steps in their historical development.

The first usage of photos and films for scientific purposes were determined by their capacity to produce *documents* of the realities they depict. Very early on, disciplines such as cultural and social anthropology, ethnology, and folklore studies discovered the particular benefits of visual data. In a strange coincidence, sociology and photography emerged at around the same time.³ Sociology however did not easily develop an intimate relationship with photography. In the mid-nineteenth century, there was an extensive use of visual materials in sociological research areas.⁴ At that time, visualizations produced by the novel technology of photographic cameras gradually began to replace the hand-drawn pictures that had hitherto accompanied ethnographic texts and served to illustrate scientific documents (Theye 1989). After 1916, photographs were abruptly replaced by tables, formulas, and graphs. Due to the growing influence of statistical methods, these suddenly became considered the only legitimate forms of scientific illustrations (Stasz 1979).

It is no wonder that in the following years, projects located on the margins or even outside the social sciences provided decisive stimuli for the development of the incipient field of visual sociology. Among the most prominent of these projects is the work of German documentary photographer August Sander. Sander was an exception among the photographers of his time. His oeuvre *People of the Twentieth Century* strikingly demonstrates his extraordinary skills and the gentle subtlety with which he took advantage of documentary photography's evocative potential. To-

3 It was in 1839 when August Comte published the first volume of his *Course de Philosophie*—the same year Daguerre's technology was announced at a meeting of the Academy of Sciences (Becker 1986).

4 Raab 2008 points out that the first uses of visual documents in sociology date from 1903 to 1915, when a series of articles were published in the *American Journal of Sociology* which used photographs as illustrations or to render documentary evidence (see for example Breckindrige and Aboth 1910; MacLean 1903; Walker 1915; Woodhead 1904).

day, his influential original work continues to be highly appreciated by ethnographic photographers. Susan Sontag (1977, 59) called it a true »example of photography-as-science,« although she commented critically on his efforts to strive for objective evidence. Sander's »sociological« endeavor consisted of taking photographic portraits which he subsequently organized into folders in order to create a visual record of his contemporary society. In a letter from July 21, 1925 addressed to Professor Erich Stenger, Sander explained his photo-documentary concept:

With the help of pure photography it is possible to create images that document the people in a genuine way and with their complete psychology. I started from this principle after acknowledging that I could create some real pictures of people, to produce a true mirror of the time in which they live [...]. For an overview of our time and our German people, I organized the photos into folders, starting with the farmer and ending with the representatives of the intellectual aristocracy (Heiting 1999, 22 [translation BS]).



Fig. 1: August Sander, *People of the Twentieth Century*: from left to right: notary, sergeant, baker, painter, cripple.

Sander's approach is remarkable for two reasons. First, because of his idea of the *visual* representation of social stratification. The carefully designed order of the photographs was intended to reflect the visible structure of social inequality as perceived by Sander, and according to how he came to interpret it. Second, he challenged the dominance of words over images, because his photographic collection was not accompanied by any textual commentary, except for a succinct caption providing the person's occupation or social status. Trusting in the demonstrative power of images, Sander argued that the photographs' order

itself would operate as a resource for their interpretation. Seen together, the photos would act as visual mutual comments on one another (Soeffner 2006).



Fig. 2: Left: Dorothea Lange, *Plantation Overseer and His Field Hands near Clarksdale, Mississippi* (1936); Right: Plate from Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1939)

Several decades later, there was another outstanding milestone in the history of visual analysis: the photo documentation of the lives of people in rural America, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and managed by the Farm Security Administration (Rusinow 1942; Evans 1973). This project was inspired by anthropological concepts and methods, and was explicitly aimed at establishing visual sociology as an independent and novel discipline. In their book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, James Agee and Walker Evans (1939) explored new ways of balancing the relationship between image and the text by emancipating pictures from their merely illustrative function: »Photographs are not illustrative. They and the text are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative« (Agee 1939, IX). It is worth noting that their photographs were the result of extensive ethnographic fieldwork. For a considerable period, they shared the daily lives of their subjects, whom they studied intensively before taking any pictures. Only after having become a part of these people's lives did they begin to take photographs. They worked sensitively and selectively, and with a perspective that allowed them to capture reality not only as it presented itself to them as photographers. Rather, they learned to perceive the everyday reality of the

groups they investigated from their subjects' point of view. The sociological value of these impressive photos transcends the narrow field of documentary photojournalism. Thus, visual sociology as a novel discipline received an important thrust from the works of talented photo documentarists such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Irving Rusinow.⁵

These works continue to exert an influence on current approaches within visual sociology. Recently, Sybilla Tinapp (2005) has taken up concepts from Sander, Evans, and others in her visual sociological research on social change in contemporary Cuban society. Her method of »visual concentration« is firmly rooted in sociological hermeneutics (Soeffner 1989; 1996).⁶ Combining the skills of both a professional photographer and a trained anthropologist, Tinapp lived for several years in Cuba, documenting the manifold manifestations of evolving social change with her camera. Putting into practice the principles of Sander, Evans, and other precursors of this method, Tinapp emphasized an emic point of view by asking her informants to themselves choose the domestic and professional scenes in which they wished to be portrayed. Moreover, once she had taken the pictures, she let her subjects select those photos they felt best represented their reality or, more precisely, their realities. By presenting her subjects in contrasting environments

5 For a critical discussion of documentary photography, see Solomon-Godeau 1991.

6 Sociological hermeneutics combines methods of textual interpretation developed over centuries of humanistic tradition with Weber's sociological theory of *Verstehen*. This »understanding« is rooted in our everyday interpretations. Everyone socialized in a particular cultural context is—more or less—able to understand, to make sense of, his or her surroundings. Based on this first-order ability, sociological hermeneutics has developed methodological instruments that lead to a deeper and broader understanding of social reality, as reflected in the materials studied. Initially this method was mainly applied to textual data such as interview transcripts or field documents. In recent years however, hermeneutical sociological interpretation has also been applied successfully to visual data.

and—like Sander—organizing the photos into folders without any textual reference except captions, Tinapp has created a unique visual record of the current transformations of everyday life in Cuba.



Fig. 3: Sybilla Tinapp (2005), Sequence IV: tourist guide, teacher, and athlete

These studies illustrate one important research focus that uses visual methods centered on the notion of *documentation*. Their main research themes included visual documentation of social problems such as the poor life conditions of ethnic minorities and marginalized social groups, or the lower classes' everyday struggle for survival.⁷ In addition, the mimetic power of photography was used in the social sciences for studying topics such as role behavior in families and was especially appreciated in the field of urban sociology (Becker 1981; 1986). If the methodological perspective of the photographic works cited above emphasizes the notion of documenting social reality, the same characteristic feature can be witnessed in the second major contribution to the history of visual analysis, namely ethnographic cinema.

7 See Stumberger 2007 and 2010 for a comprehensive history of social documentary photography.



Fig. 4: Robert Flaherty, stills from *Nanook of the North* (1922)

One can distinguish two stages in the development of ethnographic film, both grounded in different epistemologies. The first is infused with the documentary spirit mentioned above. Easily observable cultural differences and the »visibly« diverse and heterogeneous character of anthropological objects of study stimulated a new research branch and a corresponding filmmaking practice named »ethnographic cinema« or »visual anthropology.« Robert Flaherty (1884–1951) was one of the pioneers of ethnographic film. His famous documentary about the life of the Inuit, *Nanook of the North* (1922), is considered the first feature-length documentary in history, and had considerable box-office success in the United States and beyond. Flaherty spent two and a half years living with the family of Inuit hunter and fisherman Allakariallak, who plays the character of Nanook. He shot his well-known film about the daily life of the Inuit near Inukjuag on Hudson Bay.

Decades later, dynamics within classical visual anthropology, conceived as a kind of camera-supported field work, led to new methodical approaches still well-known today (See Bateson and Mead 1942; Mead 1975; Collier 1967 and 1979; and Collier and Collier 1986). Mead's and Bateson's (1942) famous study on the *Balinese Character*, which explicitly coupled social science with image-taking technologies, constituted an important innovation in social research methodology. Their study explored the role of culture for shaping personality. Technological advancements, including the miniaturization of camera equipment, allowed them to carry out an unprecedented visual ethnographic research that incorporated both photography and film. The 25,000 photographs and 22,000 feet of 16mm footage Mead and Bateson shot in Bali provided an impressive amount of data that served as both illustration and support-

ing evidence of their hypotheses. Their deliberate use of images was a response to the severe criticism that had been aimed at them earlier. Their detractors accused Mead's and Bateson's arguments of lacking scientific rigor. Both anthropologists trusted that the enormous corpus of visual data collected by their cameras would furnish their ethnography with an indisputable documentary basis and improve the expressive power of their reasoning (Harris 1986, 360).⁸

In the following years, ethnographic film achieved a certain degree of institutionalization, both in Europe and in the U.S.A. In France, the *Comité du film ethnographique* at the *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* was established. In 1953, the German *Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film* was founded in Göttingen. In the U.S., various institutional centers were created, including a center at Harvard University Department of Anthropology, the National Anthropological Film Center in Washington, D.C., and the Center for Visual Anthropology at the University of Southern California (Asch 1991). In Spain, the development of ethnographic cinema was more timid. It was marginalized as an academic discipline and associated primarily with folkloric film production (Ardèvol 2001).⁹

The second stage of the development of ethnographic film relates to the ›crisis of representation,‹ which initiated a significant reflexive turn in ethnographic cinema. The documentary *The Ax Fight* (1975) by Napoleon Chagnon and Tim Ash provides an excellent example of this shift in

8 Mead contested this critique, asserting that: »Those who have been loudest in their demand for ›scientific‹ work have been least willing to use instruments that would do for anthropology what instrumentation has done for other sciences—refine and expand the areas of accurate observation« (Mead 1975, 10).

9 Exceptions are the written and filmic work created in the *Taller de Antropología Visual* in Madrid by the anthropologists Ana Martínez, Manuel Cerezo, and Penélope Ranera, as well as Elisenda Ardèvol's visual anthropological research. These researchers have addressed the visual aspects of anthropological practice, especially in relation to fieldwork (Camas and Martínez 2004; Ardèvol 1996 and 1998; Lisón 1993).

perspective in ethnographic filmmaking. The two intended to document the lives of the Yanomami in the Amazon jungle. While they were shooting in a village, they were surprised by the sudden outburst of a fight among the Yanomami, a startling incident that occurred before their eyes. Despite their astonishment, they continued filming, although they did not understand what was happening. Thus, the footage includes both the documentation of the strange events as well as comments by the two filmmakers, expressing surprise, anguish, and incomprehension at this unexpected situation. Instead of removing what they could have considered an unwanted accident, they decided to maintain this sequence in the final cut of this film. Thereby, they intentionally address the problem of perspective and reflect on the lack of comprehension in fieldwork done by Westerners in non-western civilizations.



Fig. 5: Stills from *First Contact* (1983) by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson

A second classic ethnographic film illustrates another way of systematically contrasting different perspectives using cinematographic resources. The German version of this Academy Award nominated film was released under the title *Als die weißen Geister kamen* (i.e. *When the white spirits came*, 1984). It reconstructs the »discovery« of indigenous peoples in the interior of Papua New Guinea from their own point of view, combining rediscovered historical material with more recent footage. In the early 1930s, a team of Australian gold prospectors ventured into the mountains of New Guinea's unexplored interior, where they met a tribal population who had never had any contact with white people. One of the Australians, Michael Leahy, filmed this encounter between twentieth-century Western culture and a »primitive civilization«. The material was forgotten for 50 years until filmmakers Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson rediscovered it. They decided to revisit the people and interview those involved in the original encounter. Their film confronts the his-

torical viewpoint with a contemporary perspective, and also juxtaposes the standpoints of the Western adventurers and those of the villagers. In this way, the encounter is reconstructed from different angles. By intersecting old and new footage, they create a new type of documentary that contains parallel perspectives, and tells a story of colonialism and its aftermath. The filmmakers mix captivating recordings of first encounters with interview sequences of the Leahy brothers recounting their experience during the expedition.¹⁰

The examples cited here have something else in common. They use the audio-visual medium as a *resource* to produce a record of a given reality. This is done through artistic forms of expressions in order to present those features the filmmakers consider relevant. In other words, they use visual material predominantly as a support for what in technical terms would be called data collection and presentation of results, while skipping over the most important phase in any sociological investigation: the analysis.

Before going on to discuss the use of cameras as devices for analytical purposes, we should note that despite the initial efforts mentioned above, the foundation of visual sociology in the proper sense did not take place before the 1970s (Cheatwood and Stasz 1979; Schändlinger 1998). In that decade, the production, analysis, and interpretation of visual data were organized for the first time as a specialized discipline within the social sciences. During the 1980s, visual sociology enjoyed a major boost: several journals were published regularly, a series of conferences were held, and important anthologies printed. In this period, numerous introductory student manuals were issued, some of them accompanied by didactical tutorials. Several universities in the U.S. offered post-graduate courses and seminars in which the theory and practice of

10 The documentary is part of a series of five films produced by Conolly and Anderson between 1983 and 2001 and was originally entitled *First Contact* (1983). On current developments in the sociology of film, see the anthology recently edited by Heinze, Moebius, and Reicher 2012.

visual sociology was taught (Curry and Clarke 1978; Curry 1984; Henney 1986).

But despite the enormous efforts undertaken to broaden the field of visual sociology (Caufield 1996; Harper 1988; 1996), and to ensure its institutional basis as an autonomous, specialized sub-discipline within academic sociology, it began to lose authority from the late 1980s onwards. This was due mainly to the increasing popularity and pervasiveness of cultural studies, which had a significant impact, especially, but not exclusively, in Anglo-Saxon academic communities. Cultural studies sought to establish, as a ›post-disciplinary‹ project, what has become known as visual culture and visual studies.¹¹ Despite the criticism of its implicit socio-political agenda and its insufficient methodological instruments of discourse analysis (Bal 2002), one of the unquestionable merits of visual studies is its emphasis on the increasingly important role of audio-visual media in people's daily life and work.

The growing appeal of media and communication studies, especially the study of mass media (Chaplin 1994; Long 1997; Mikos 1999) also weakened the strength of visual sociology. In Germany, attempts to institutionalize visual anthropology and visual sociology suffered the same fate as in the U.S.¹² But outside the mainstream of the social sciences, some qualitative studies remained within the minority position of visual sociology by studying the nonprofessional use of cameras in everyday life

11 Bryson, Holly, and Moxey 1991; Evans and Hall 1999; Jenks 1995; Mirzoeff 1998; Mirzoeff 1999; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Walker and Chaplin 1997. Recently, visual studies (Schulz 2005, 85–91) has intended to create a *Bildkulturwissenschaft* or »new science of image culture« (Holert 2000, 21), combining notions derived from critical theory, media studies and critical discourse analysis and transferring them from texts to audio-visual forms of cultural expression.

12 Ballhaus 1985; Taureg 1984; 1986; Teckenburg 1982; Wuggenig 1990/1991. This development is symptomatically illustrated by the existence of an entry on the subject (»Visuelle Soziologie,« Berghaus 1989) in the first edition of the German Dictionary of Sociology (Endruweit and Trommsdorf 1989) and its absence in the subsequent edition (Endruweit and Trommsdorf 2002).

and in advertising. This approach started around the 1960s when still cameras became popular. Bourdieu et al.'s ([1965]) well-known study on photography as »middlebrow art« and Goffman's (1979) study on »gender advertisements« are situated in this context. At that time, photographic images began to massively penetrate many areas of daily life. These studies discovered markedly varying aesthetic practices in different social stratum, as well as visually mediated ways of presenting stereotypes of men and women.

Subsequently, research was extended to the study of certain popular television genres and their respective styles.¹³ The end of the era of »mass production« (Piore and Sabel 1989) in the economy in general and in consumer culture in particular also had a major impact on the »reality of the mass media« (Luhmann 1995). Social differentiation, the fragmentation of audiences, and diversification, together with the increasing »democratization« of media were the results. This ended an era dominated by the sociology of mass communication (Hunziker 1988; Maletzke 1988). Individualization and the imminent rise of the multi-optional communicative society transformed many of the previous approaches, and united them under the new banner of cultural studies.¹⁴

Studies undertaken within the framework of visual studies have, however, also faced severe criticism. They have been accused of overemphasizing epistemological problems and debates concerning the »truth« of images and how images may cheat the spectator, while disregarding methodological issues. Few researchers, though, were preoccupied with questions such as how to use audio-visual media appropriately for social

13 Such as advertisements (Kotelmann and Mikos 1981), news (Keppler 1985) and films (Kepplinger 1987) or telenovelas (Rössler 1988).

14 See also Chaplin 1994; Long 1997; Mikos 1999. This branch of visual sociology has experienced a significant boom over the past few years. One should mention the International Visual Sociology Association, IVSA, which edits a specialized academic journal entitled *Visual Studies*, as well as approaches such as participatory visual research or visual ethnography (Pink 2007).

research purposes.¹⁵ This has had decisive consequences for current research on and with visual and audio-visual data. Indubitably, research with visual data had to evolve beyond classical notions of media sociology and mass media research (See Albrecht 1991; Hunziker 1988; Denzin 2000; Rose 2000; Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Loizos 2000), not only in terms of its objects of study and the respective social fields in which those are embedded, but also as regards conceptual and methodological questions.

First analytical uses of the camera

Parallel to the developments outlined so far, one can draw a different trajectory for the field of researching with visual materials. In this field, the use of the camera as a tool for analyzing phenomena of human action and interaction dominates, sometimes in an almost microscopic manner. This second field dates back to early days when photography emerged as a new technology. Capable of visualizing and documenting the most diverse phenomena, the camera initially became a device for recording and analyzing body movements. The British photographer Eadweard Muybridge quickly recognized the new possibilities offered by this discovery and in the 1870s invented a photographic apparatus for taking multiple snapshots of a galloping horse and recording them on one plate. These photographs were the first representations of an ordered sequence of motion, an analysis obtained from methods that could be replicated and verified (Frutos 1991). Soon after, these images appeared in the most prestigious scientific journals (including *Scientific American*, and *The Nature*), attracting much attention among the scientific community. Muybridge's photos were even compared to the images obtained with instruments like the telescope or microscope, because the

15 Although there are important exceptions, see for example Jordan and Henderson 1995; Heath 1986 and 1997a; or Lomax and Casey 1998. See below for a more detailed discussion.

photographic sequences allowed the analysis of phases of rapid locomotion and thereby opened a hitherto invisible world to the human eye.¹⁶

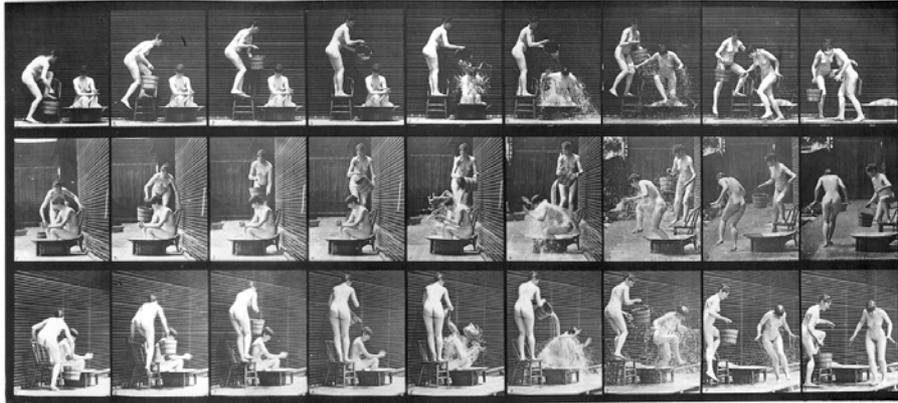


Fig. 6: Eadweard Muybridge: *Human Females in Motion Nude*, Vol. 4, Plate 408 (1887)

In sociology, however, methodological competence in analyzing visual and audiovisual data still remained underdeveloped and weak, compared for example with the long and well-established tradition of ethnographic film in anthropology. One may recall, as prime examples, the work of Ray Birdwhistell (1970), one of Erving Goffman's tutors, or the approach developed by Albert Schefflen and Adam Kendon (Kendon 1990) and known as »context analysis.« This approach was based on and continued the seminal research of the so-called Palo Alto group—Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Margaret Mead, and Gregory Bateson—which analyzed a small sequence of a film (the »Doris Film«). The Palo Alto group combined context analysis with the »natural history approach« (Pittinger,

16 Muybridge's pioneering work is appreciated because he »also opened up for scrutiny such diverse human activities as standing, leaping, lifting a ball, fencing, and a woman with multiple sclerosis, walking« (Heath et al. 2010, 3). But surely sociological analysis transcends the mere analysis of locomotion. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that Muybridge's work exerted a strong influence on the development of scientific management and is closely associated with a rather positivist perspective.

Hockett, and Danehy 1960). Birdwhistell, Kendon and Scheflen developed a method to analyze interactions which can be called sociological in the proper sense. While the psychological studies of Ekman and Friesen (1969) focused on individual forms of emotional expression, in their audio-visual studies they focused on social interaction, a subject that is also studied in comparative ethology, but along different methodological lines (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Schiefenhövel, and Heeschen 1989). In this and other methods—such as human ethology, proxemics (Hall [1962]) or contextual analysis, audio-visual data is used to scrutinize the role of physical behavior, i.e. the body's role in interactions. This leads to real discoveries such as the use of common space in informal groups called »face formation« or »F-formation« (Kendon 1990b).¹⁷

Interpretive Video Analysis

Interpretive video analysis is one of the subfields of visual analysis that has contributed to a certain revival of visual research methods over the past years. Its theoretical and methodological bases and its current applications cannot be discussed in detail here.¹⁸ The purpose of this section is to allow readers to contextualize interpretive video analysis within the broader development of visual research methods. Interpretive video analysis was influenced by developments in the field of anthropology, ethology, and human communication theory described above. It has also benefited from linguistic studies of the forms and structures of verbal interaction. Among its precursors we find the work of linguist John J. Gumperz, who filmed sequences of intercultural interactions in the 1970s. Gumperz recorded interactions to determine the causes of misunderstanding between people from different cultural backgrounds, and used audio-visual material for a microanalysis of these interactions. In *Crosstalk* he studied, among other things, service interactions between waiters and guests in a restaurant and between bank clerks and custom-

17 In recent years, Kendon has contributed to the study of gesture (2004).

18 Elsewhere, we have discussed different approaches of videography and video analysis at length (see Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnetler 2013, especially chapter 2).

ers. Paying special attention to the ways in which these interactions were performed, he came to discover how, for example, variations in accent and inflection may cause misunderstandings between English-speaking native inhabitants and English-speaking immigrants from South Asia. The approach he developed—interactional linguistics—demonstrates that there is a high potential for misunderstandings stemming from different cultural pronunciations and inflections. One of the outcomes of Gumperz’s analyses was the production of a TV program broadcasted in cooperation with the BBC (Gumperz, Jupp, and Roberts 1979).¹⁹

In the early 1980s, the gradual introduction and social dissemination of video camcorder technology led to a considerable expansion of audio-visual data as an object of scientific study and to a substantial increase in analytical skills in this area. In psychology, this development nurtured predominantly quantitative and standardized methods,²⁰ whereas in sociology, a strong orientation emerged towards qualitative methods of video analysis—a return to the classical task of studying interactions. One of the firsts and most important researchers in this respect was Charles Goodwin (1981; 1986), whose seminal work used video-analysis to studying phenomena of interaction hitherto only studied using audio records, and who systematically addressed the role of visual aspects of interactions. Around this time, Christian Heath (1986) published his path-breaking video-analytical study on doctor–patient interaction.²¹ The work of both of these researches, also grounded in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, was highly influential for an incipient area of research using video-analysis and focused on interactions in technologized work environments, workplace studies or WPS (Luff, Hindmarsh,

19 This program is a valuable example of how to present research results to larger audiences. The development of adequate publication formats is one of the challenges still faced by video analysis.

20 See, for example, Mittenecker 1987 or Koch and Zumbach 2002. One should also mention the famous Stanford Prison Experiment. For a comprehensive overview, see Reichert 2007.

21 See also Erickson 2011 and Johnson and Amador 2011 for a history of video analysis.

and Heath 2000). Heath is among the few who have developed new principles and original methods of video analysis.²² Lucy Suchman, who used video-based fieldwork to analyze interconnected but spatially distant workplaces activities in four locations within an airport as a highly complex environment (Suchman and Trigg 1991), also played an important role in the emergence of WPS. In workplace studies, the interactive articulation of work in centers of control, coordination, and observation are studied intensively, bringing together approaches from sociology, ethnography, design, and cognitive disciplines. Recently, workplace studies has been extended to areas including interactions in museums, galleries, and auctions (Lehn and Heath 2004; 2013).²³

Important theoretical and methodical advancement in the field of visual analysis can also be ascribed to a related, but theoretically different line of thought associated with the communicative paradigm of the new sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch 1996, Luckmann 1997; 2006a). Grounded in interpretive sociological theory and following Weber, Schütz, and Berger as well as Luckmann, the concept of the »communicative construction of reality«²⁴ stems from sociological theory and sociolinguistics. Within its conceptual and theoretical framework, the sequential analysis and interpretation of audio-visual data plays a crucial

22 On the development of WPS, see also Heath, Knoblauch, and Luff 2000. Methods of video analysis are discussed in Heath 1997b and Heath and Hindmarsh 2002. See also the recent textbook edited by Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010. The decisive role of ethno-methodological approaches for the methodological advancement of video analysis cannot be overestimated.

23 See also the video analyses of work in hospitals and surgeries (Schubert 2002; 2006a; Muntanyola 2010), architectural offices (Büscher 2005), or the ethnographies of scientific laboratories (Amann and Knorr Cetina 1988; 2002), which pay special attention to the role of the visual.

24 The notion of a communicative construction of reality was first developed in Knoblauch 1995. It has ramifications for genre analysis, discourse analysis (SKAD) and sociological hermeneutics, respectively. For a recent collection see Keller, Knoblauch, and Reichertz 2012.

role.²⁵ The theory of communicative genres was originally developed for the interpretation of oral genres (Luckmann 1986; 1995; Günthner and Knoblauch 1995; Knoblauch and Luckmann 2004). Its corresponding method, genre analysis, was transformed into a method for investigating the forms of mass media communication, and applied to the values, activity patterns, and status and gender differences in various social sectors, and their respective symbols, cosmologies, and world views (See Ayaß 1997; Keppler 1985; Knoblauch and Raab 2001; Willems 1999).

In the 1970s Luckmann and Gross initiated a research project using video data to investigate human interaction (Gross and Luckmann 1977) in which the concept of interaction scores was developed (Bergmann, Luckmann, and Soeffner 1993; Luckmann 2006b), recently taken up by video hermeneutics (Raab and Tänzler 2006). A product of the tradition of hermeneutics, initially used exclusively for the interpretation of texts and conversations, this methodological approach is progressively working with other materials and data such as images and other forms of visual expression, to investigate historical changes in forms of expression, perception, and presentation beyond oral and textual communication.²⁶

25 For a reconstruction of the history of this approach, see Luckmann 2013. Starting from the notion that social reality is constructed in and through social action, he emphasizes the revolutionary advantages of audio-visual technology for the sociological study of how reality is actually constructed: »[...] in the past decades, taking the new technologies for granted, we have been in an increasingly better position to direct our efforts to an analysis of the ›production process‹ in relation to the ›product‹ and in relation to the ›consumption‹ of the ›product‹, *i.e.*, to an analysis of interaction and dialogue both as a part of social reality and as source of much of social reality. [...] I am convinced that sequential analysis provides the empirical foundation for an essential component of contemporary social theory, in particular for one of its branches, the sociology of knowledge.« [Emphasis in the original.]

26 This is happening in structural hermeneutics (Englisch 1991; Hauptert 1994; Loer 1994; Müller-Doohm 1993; 1997; Tykwer 1992), the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge (Hitzler and Barth 1996; Pfadenhauer 2001; Reichertz 1994; 2000; 2001), sociological hermeneutics (Raab 2001; 2002; Raab, Grunert, and Lustig 2001; Raab and Tänzler 1999;

A still unfinished story

The aim of this article has been to present some of the precursors of the still unfinished history of visual analysis in social research in general, and to trace the roads leading to its current development in the field of interpretive video analysis in particular. Since its beginnings, visual analysis has suffered ups and downs. Currently, it is attracting renewed interest in many disciplines throughout the social sciences, generating novel approaches in studies using visual techniques, both photography and video. Today, interpretive video analysis has been extended to a series of sociological research areas and continues to develop in various directions.²⁷

The current boom of visual analysis in the social sciences is fueled by ongoing changes in contemporary culture regarding the proliferation of visualizations and their ever-increasing use in mundane communicative activities. At least partly, this methodological shift in social research is profiting from a more general sociocultural development in which visual forms of communication are gaining in importance. This is most certainly also related to the pervasive use of digital photography and video. The omnipresence of photography and videos in our culture is obvious. The widespread and general acceptance of technologies and video recordings both in domestic life and in the institutional spheres of our society will also generate new methods of scientific research that uses visual and audio-visual data. The development of interpretive methods

2002; 2006; Soeffner and Raab 2004; Tänzler 2000; 2001; Soeffner 2000; 2001) and similar approaches which try to synthesize theories and methods within the sociology of knowledge (Bergmann, Luckmann, and Soeffner 1993; Bohnsack 2001; 2005; 2008; 2009; Guschker 2001; Schnettler 2001).

27 Including schools and educational institutions (Wagner-Willi 2006; Baltruschat 2010) social gatherings and public events in migration research (Rebstein 2012), or science and technology studies (Schubert 2006b; 2006a), to name but a few. For a more detailed overview see Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 2013, chapter 4.

of video analysis has accelerated significantly over the past few years, as recent publications well demonstrate.²⁸

Audio-visual methods of production and data analysis in interpretive studies can offer promising new horizons for the empirical study of social realities. In the past few years, visual methods have experienced important progress. However, the field continues to be highly dynamic; the next chapters in its history remain open. It is in the hands of other researchers to add new sections and chapters to this story.

28 See Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff 2010; Moritz 2010; Corsten, Krug, and Moritz 2010; Reichertz and Engler 2010; or Tuma, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 2013. In terms of methodological advancement, the contribution of Tuma 2012 towards a »vernacular video analysis« has particular methodological relevance.

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