

Video and Textual Materials in Qualitative Research

Criminology 321

Textual Material

- The list of these is virtually endless
- Criminologists have paid particular attention to files (e.g., in prisons, asylums) and media (especially newspapers) and policy documents (change over time, drafts)
 - Historical records typically far better than contemporary
 - More complete, candid (selective deposit, survival)

Textual Material: Examples

- Looking (with Menzies) at files of the “criminally insane” from BC asylums from the 1870s to the 1950s
- Erin Denton’s MA thesis trying to create a profile of “human trafficking” from international media
- Tamara Reid’s MA thesis on how PTSD and especially PTSD defences are portrayed in media
- Peter McKnight and the construction of crime

Video Materials

- Various ways film and video have appeared in qualitative research.
- We have already considered:
 - Video ethnography; participatory action research
- Two others:
 - Videos as source material for content analysis
 - Video documentary

Video as Source Material

Video Source Material

- Video is a raw material awaiting scrutiny – social artefacts begging for analysis. e.g.:
 - how “the TV news” is constructed
 - analyzing the social content of pornography
 - assessing violence on TV
 - virtually any Youtube category
 - representations of Indigenous Peoples

Video Source Material

- Two projects of mine that relied exclusively on video source material:
 - Study of video pornography for Fraser Committee; extent to which it included sex, violence and sexual violence
 - Images of Aboriginal people in film

Images of Indigenous People

- Bruce Trigger had done a history of written histories of Canada from 1700s on
- Showed that representations of Canada's Indigenous peoples changed as European fortunes/interests changed
 - When Europeans needed Indigenous peoples, images positive; when interests turned to colonization, images negative

Images of Indigenous People

- My research focussed on the era of film (b. 1895); looked at interplay of policy, portrayals, science
- Beliefs in late 1800s/early 1900s were that Aboriginal people and cultures were destined to disappear (Manifest Destiny; Social Darwinism; Demographics)
- Anthropologists, photographers and early filmmakers sought to document what was seen as the end of an era

In the Land of the War Canoes **- 1914 -**

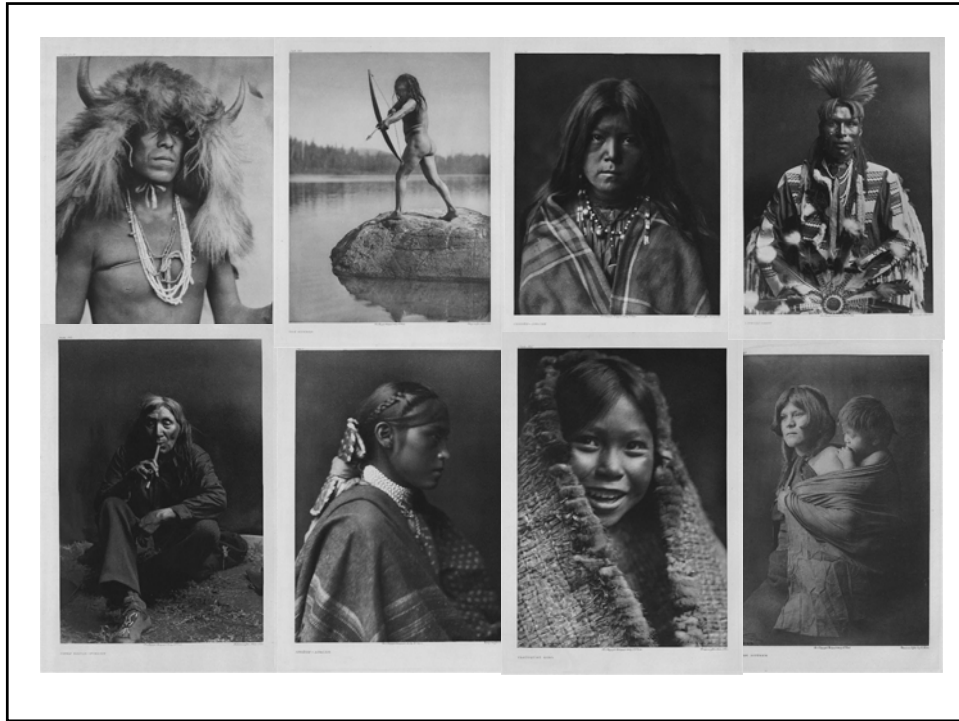


Do Photographs Tell the Truth?

- Becker asked this question in relation to photographs; applicable here
- Photographs are literally true
- But more to it than that: context, (dis)simulation, motives of photographer
 - Curtis's films say as much or more about Curtis as about his subjects
 - *War Canoes* a contrived story

Do Photographs Tell the Truth?

- Curtis fancied himself an ethnographer
- Created museum pieces: removed all traces of modernism and material culture
- Promotes the view that Aboriginality is part of the past, and not of the future
- And yet the images are undeniably beautiful, and many Aboriginal people cherish what he left behind



“The Vanishing Race”

- One of Curtis’s most famous photos
- Assumed an inevitable oblivion
- Constructed the situation in “racial” terms
- Spun by social Darwinians



Images of Indigenous People

- By the 1930s the downward linear demographic trajectory of Indigenous peoples had reversed; they were not going to disappear
- Policy turned to active suppression of Aboriginal cultures
- Hollywood adds to the mythology

Images of Indigenous People

- In 1941 the U.S. was not yet in the war, but nationalistic sentiment was being fanned
- The story of Colonel Custer spun as a take of honour, virtue, and dying for a good cause

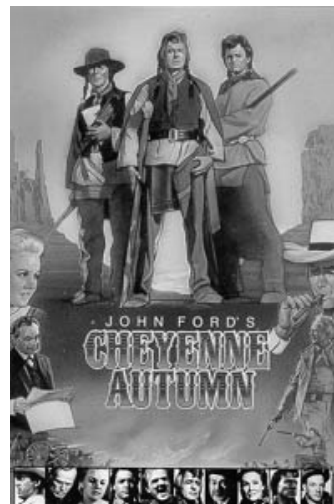


They Died with Their Boots On - 1941 -



Images of Indigenous People

- By the 1960s white misdeeds had been recognized but written off as exceptional
- Assimilation – couched as non-discrimination – the objective of the day



Cheyenne Autumn - 1964 -



Images of Indigenous People

- The images Hollywood created of Indigenous people are important to understand because most non-Aboriginal Canadians
 - learn little to nothing about contemporary Indigenous cultures/people(s) in school
 - have never had an Aboriginal friend
 - do not know what FN lives on the other side of the tracks, bridge, river, or whatever

Video Documentary

Video Documentary

- These days Indigenous people are participants in the film-making process, both as collaborators and filmmakers
- Not surprisingly, much of the early emphasis has been on exposing injustices, setting the record straight and supplying hitherto silenced perspectives



Video Interviews

- Other examples:
 - Oral history of Ezzat Fattah
 - *Globe & Mail* feature entitled “Talking with the Taliban”
 - Journalist Graeme Smith gave camera and list of questions to trusted researcher/friend
 - Cameras garnered too much attention at roadblocks; changed to cell phones

Talking to the Taliban



Video Interviews

- As the proliferation of video continues, archival/longitudinal works become a possibility. For example,
 - Video interviews in Geneva at the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations; did some in 1994 and 2004 at beginning and end of the Indigenous Decade
 - Michael Apter and the “Up” series

The “Up” Series

- Combines interview and documentary
- Began in 1963 with a study of fourteen 7-year olds [called *7-Up*]
- An examination of British class structure
- Took as a premise the Jesuit saying “Give me a child until he is seven, and I will give you the man”

The “Up” Series

- Selected from a variety of contrasting class, gender and ethnic backgrounds
- Asked who they were, what they liked, what they thought of the world around them and what they thought would happen to them in the future
- Has gone back every 7 years since

The “Up” Series: Suzy



The “Up” Series: John



In Conclusion...

- Video-based traditions are simultaneously very old and very new in the domain of qualitative research
 - Old: Film begins with Louis Lumière and the *cinématographe* in 1895
 - New: Accessible camcorders; digital video software; YouTube; simulcasts

Challenges to Research Video

- So why do we do all of this?
- The list of reasons people do research is a lengthy one:
 - to understand something about other people and cultures;
 - to try and rise above injustice;
 - to formulate better social policy;
 - to help people and organizations and communities change their lives

Challenges to Research Video

- Is insightful social commentary and critique now the job of those outside the academy?
- Is ethics review as currently practised a form of *a priori* censorship?
 - For example, ongoing discussions regarding research in disaster setting
 - Meanwhile, Spike Lee releases a 4-volume set on Hurricane Katrina