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Curry and Clarke: Introducing Visual Sociology

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Curry and Clarke: Introducing Visual Sociology

printed extra light because his Indian friends did not want to see themselves with dark skin" [1975:69].

⁵ Becker, in reviewing Owens' *Suburbia* (1972) and *Our Kind of People* (1975), said that "Owens' pictures are both respectful and condescending, sympathetic and contemptuous, depending on who is looking, where, and when" (1976:64). What is the basis for interpretation of symbols in each context?

⁶ In my paper (1977) I have shown how the logic of organizing an album reflects the ideology of the milieu in which the album exists.

⁷See, for instance, Davidson's *East 100th Street* (1970), Owens' *Suburbia* (1973), and Silber's *Rural Maine* (1972).

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Nonverbal Communication: A Research Guide and Bibliography. Mary Ritchie Key. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1977. 445 pp., illustrations. \$17.50 (cloth).

Reviewed by Ray L. Birdwhistell
University of Pennsylvania

Mary Ritchie Key has presented us with an unusual compendium of bibliographic notes and items representing a body of material remaining from the research which led to her *Kinesics and Paralanguage* (1975). Professor Key, in her very useful and other-serving work as editor of her clearing-house, has earned the respect and gratitude of a wide spectrum of students, researchers, and interested onlookers. We have looked forward to the publication of this book to see whether it would focus more tightly upon problems left lightly touched on or broadly conceived of in her earlier discussion. This volume, however, neither in its discussion nor in its extended bibliography is definitive. The breadth of the author's interests, while productive of years of reading in the general area of body activity, leads to the presentation of a bibliography so diffuse as to suggest an absence of critical choice. And yet this judgment is probably unfair. From my point of view two contrasting theoretical frames are prevalent today in the general arena which might be termed "the relationship between human body activity and human communication." One of these positions, succinctly stated by Key, is "Human communication is body movement" (p. 5). The alternative position, which has governed my research and theory, is that the social processes involved with patterned human interaction employ the *relationships* between body activities. From this latter point of view "nonverbal communication" becomes that social behavior which can be seen regularly to influence human interaction even if the investigator ignores lexical behavior. All human societies possess and utilize language; they are not speechless when silent.

However, this question is perhaps moot for those who wish to get a perspective on the vast array of attitudes, observations, and reflections in these areas. I think that the "Research Guide" part of the title is a misnomer. But Mary Ritchie Key has deepened our indebtedness to her by the extended discussion (139 pages) and voluminous bibliography (approximately 300 pages). I look forward to seeing an annotated bibliography from her. I can think of no one more qualified to present one.

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Introducing Visual Sociology. Timothy J. Curry and Alfred C. Clarke. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt, 1977. vi + 93 pp., photographs. No price (paper).

Reviewed by George Psathas
Boston University

This is a workbook-manual designed to introduce sociology undergraduates first to the study of visual images in their own society and second to the doing of

visual studies themselves. An introductory section of 40 pages makes the case for the study of visuals. A set of ten exercises or projects then guides the student in making a series of collections and studies. The section focuses primarily on the uses of still photography, and exclusively so in the exercises presented.

The authors intend to stimulate interest in a "new dimension of sociology" (p. iii)—the visual study of society. They are self-consciously aware of the newness and innovativeness of the area, and seek to guide the student to new explorations. They convey a sense of adventure and excitement about their project, and they seek to stimulate others to follow their leads. They provide a series of photographs taken by contemporary sociologists (Cataldo, Quinney, Stasz, Erickson, Rosenblum, and others including themselves) to introduce the book, as if to say, "Here are singular images of considerable interest and depth which persons in your field have taken." Offered without commentary they can be taken as inspiration or exhortation to others.

The text part of the manual, some 25 pages, of which 12 are pages of photographs, is too brief to do more than suggest a few approaches to a visual sociology. The main approach advocated by the authors is (1) the use of the camera to obtain new kinds of information to supplement verbal descriptions and analyses and to stimulate new modes of studying society using the concepts of sociology translated or mediated through visuals, and (2) the merger of visual and verbal perspectives to provide more adequate descriptions and analyses of social life. Their theoretical perspective is vaguely eclectic and favors an ethnographic-field research strategy.

At the same time the authors mention the possibilities of the visual medium as a source of data—a faithful data-collecting device which enables the researcher to discover things previously unnoticed. This emphasis on discovery and collection is admittedly more difficult for undergraduates to work with, and perhaps it is put aside for this reason. The rest of the text enumerates rapidly a number of the positive advantages in visual sociology and argues for their further exploration. A two-page bibliography is included.

The mixture of all things that come under the heading of visual sociology as used by these authors is a problem. The term has been and still is used to refer to the sociological study of visual images (the sociology of visual images) and the study of society through visual images made or collected by the sociologist (the visual study of society). The former includes most of the exercises in the book: Project 1, for example, asks students to analyze a photograph; 2, to inventory all images seen during a single day; 3, to analyze portraits in relation to self-concepts; 4, to analyze a family snapshot and the occasion and relationships portrayed; 7, to collect and analyze photographs of persons in occupational roles; and 8, to analyze advertisements for ways in which gender roles, norms, rituals, and dominance patterns are displayed.

A smaller number of exercises teach the student to use a camera to conduct a visual study: exercise 5 sends students to study symbols worn to display persons' reference group identities; 6 studies similarities and dissimilarities in

clothing between friends and acquaintances; 9 sends the student to study symbols of age, gender, and status in cemeteries; and 10 asks for an original project which may involve making original photographs.

The weight of the exercises is therefore on the study of visuals rather than on the making of visual images. That both are needed is not in dispute. By learning to analyze visual images, the student can become a better observer, recorder, and photographer. The analysis of visuals can reveal the operation of the culture, norms, and rules as well as the ways in which status, role, and membership are conventionally displayed in photographs as cultural objects. The visual images produced by members of the culture are indeed rich resources for analysis of cultural conventions. However, when students are then sent to make yet other images, how are their own sets of cultural understandings, that taken-for-granted stock of knowledge, to be used? Will the image be drawn upon uncritically as a resource or made self-consciously into a topic of study itself? The study of other peoples' displays of knowledge of the culture cannot alone enable photographer-sociologists to produce images which are any different from their own. What is missing from the authors' studies and exercises is attention to this problem. Why are we not to analyze the photographs of the student in the same way the student analyzed the photographs made by others? The questions brought to bear on the students' own collections of visual studies of society are different from those to be asked by the students of other peoples' photographs. For example, exercise 6—"How long has the dyad known each other? How did the dyad describe their relationship?"—assumes that the subjects of the study can be studied *through* the photographs made by the student. The photographs are assumed to be *of* the subjects as the subjects are portrayed *in* and *through* the photographs. In contrast, when students collect photographs made by other people, the photographs themselves and the objects they portray are the topics of study. Questions concern the photograph, how it was made, who made it, what one's reactions to it are, what conventions operated to produce the particular poses and arrangements shown, where the picture was taken and published, what stereotypes are depicted, what "little study" the ad tells, and so on.

It is clear that the authors are not aware of the problem of reflexivity, nor are most sociologists. It allows us to produce visual studies in which we, as photographer-sociologists or anthropologists, remain unexamined, unnoticed, and outside the frame of our own creations. We can be said to be studying the world "out there," but we are somehow not a part of the process of studying it. When we turn to study others' photographs, however, we, as social scientists, can study the creator-producer-users of the photographs *and* the scenes depicted in the photographs themselves.

The reflexivity of all observation is not a matter peculiar to visual studies or to studies of visuals. As long as it remains outside our awareness, however, it will return to plague us. Phenomenological, existential, and ethnomethodological approaches to the study of society are the best sources of help on this issue, since they recognize the problem of reflexivity—and recognition is at least a first step in clarifying and modifying our

approach to visual studies of society and to studies of visuals.

Nevertheless, the authors have done a service in bringing out a workbook-manual which will orient undergraduates, and instructors who have not yet considered ways of doing such studies, to the possibilities of a visual sociology. Although limited and not strong in its presentation of the potentials for original research using photography, this publication will provide a good introduction for the intended audience.

Eskimo Art: Tradition and Innovation in North Alaska.
Dorothy Jean Ray. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977. x + 298 pp., 307 black-and-white photographs. \$29.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Nelson H. H. Graburn
University of California, Berkeley

This encyclopedic work is the latest of Dorothy Jean Ray's many works on Alaskan Eskimo arts and may represent the culmination of her decades of research in northern and western Alaska. It is also the latest of a number of recent volumes on the historical and contemporary arts of the Eskimo (Burland 1973; Ritchie 1974; Roch 1975; Swinton 1972) and is a major contribution to the important trend to take seriously the nontraditional arts of native peoples (Graburn 1976). Though the book was published in connection with an exhibition shown at the Henry Art Gallery at the University of Washington, in May 1977, it is more nearly an encyclopedia than a catalog, in that it attempts to describe and comment on the significance of all the genres or arts and crafts of the North Alaskan Eskimo in historical and recent times.

This is a large volume, with an 11 by 8½ inch format, wide margins, and plentiful illustrations, as befits the breadth of the subject matter surveyed. In spite of the imbalance between text (69 pages) and illustrations (176 pages), which is partially redressed by the extensive captions placed next to the photographs, this is not a "coffee table" book as it might first appear. Though the book is adequately illustrated, the photographs are all black and white and not spectacular, nor is the paper on which they are reproduced of high quality. Furthermore, as the author explains in the "Note about the Photographs," many of them were taken purely for the record under "home-made" conditions with ancient equipment. More than a small proportion of the plates lack definition either through having unsuitable backgrounds or through being out of focus. It should be added that a few of the institutionally produced photographs (e.g., #237 from the Smithsonian Institution) also suffer from the same faults, whereas some of the very oldest photographs (e.g., #296 by Lomen, 1903) are superb, as are the line drawings (taken from Choris 1822, and others) which illustrate the oldest material culture.

The book is for the serious collector and scholar interested in all aspects of Alaska Eskimo material culture.

The contents cover the area from St. Michael north around to the Canadian border, roughly the Inupik-speaking area, plus St. Lawrence Island (included because of its historical and stylistic affinities), and the time span is from 1778 to the present. After a short Foreword (by Richard Grove), the very brief Preface and Chapter I cover the historical and cultural contexts of Eskimo art. The bulk of the text comprises Chapter II on Traditional Art and Chapter III on Market Art. These sections are organized by material and genre, in approximately chronological order, allotting a page or so to each type. The breadth of the study will become obvious to the readers from the following lists: (1) Traditional Art includes Wood; Masks, Sculpture; Ivory; Charms, Amulets, Dolls, Decorated Utilitarian Objects; Baleen; Flint; Stone; Jade; Charms; Mythological Creatures: Painting and Engraving; Body and Face Painting, Tattooing, Rock Painting; Modified Engraving; Ice, Frost, Feathers and Decoys: Clay Pots, Mud Decoys, Rock *inuksuks*, Ice Models; Sewing: Ceremonial and Vanity, Traded Skins, Clothing, Ornament, Coiffure, Ptarmigan Quill Work; Weaving, Basketry: Grass, Birchbark. (2) Market Arts comprise Ivory Carvings; Wood Carvings; Other Materials: Bone, Baleen, Whale and Elephant Ivory; Stone; Soapstone Carving, Fakes; The Billiken; New Engraving; Figurines; Ivory Jewelry; Erotic Objects: Walrus Penis; Baleen Baskets; Bentwood Buckets, Horn Ladles and Dolls; Siberian-style Pipes; Caribou Jaw-Model Sleds; Skin Masks; Cloth and Fur Products; Drawings, Clothing, Soft Dolls, Appliqued Skin and Felt Pictures, and Stitchery.

Each of the above is described in an authoritative fashion, with attention to history, outside influences, and materials, in sections ranging in length from a paragraph to two pages. Each section in turn is well illustrated in the many photographs with long explanatory captions; in fact, the plates illustrate well over 600 objects. The last part of Chapter III is devoted to Projects and Programs rather than genres, and is again nearly encyclopedic, including the Indian Arts and Crafts Board; Alaskan Native Arts and Crafts Cooperative; Shungnak Jade Project; Kivalina Caribou Hood Project; Noorvik Projects and Taxco; Canadian Eskimo Art; Designer Craftsmen Training Project; University Projects, Arts Centers and Native Art Shows, and so on—described by the author as a flood of academic and subsidized programs since 1965. The artists themselves and the technical processes employed are partially illustrated in the last thirteen plates of the photographic section, but the bulk of the illustrations is devoted to objects rather than their creation.

As noted by Richard Grove in the Foreword, Dorothy Ray is "thoroughly unsentimental . . . she tells us exactly where we may see fine collections of Eskimo art of the past in museums, and she speaks of young people who are 'in the vanguard of the new Alaskan art'" (p.v.). Dorothy Ray herself stresses the ceaseless ingenuity of the Eskimo craftsmen and the immense variety of their arts; she does not bemoan lost genres but expresses her "gratitude to the nonnative custom of collecting for collecting's sake. . . . Without the white man's compul-