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COMMENT

Jenness and Malinowski: Fieldwork and Photographs

I should like to add to the discussion presented by Terry Wright in his recent essay in *JASO* (Wright 1991). Before doing so, however, it is worth remarking how the historical and visual interpretation of photographs, in its full complexity and fluidity, is at last finding a respectable place in anthropology.

Wright generously acknowledges both my comments on an early draft of his essay and the exhibition of Jenness's photographs that I have curated recently at the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford. It is unfortunate that Wright's essay was so long through the press, for new work, in connection with the exhibition in particular and with the history of anthropology and photography in general, suggests not only a somewhat different interpretation of the material than that he presents but also has substantial bearing on our understanding of the broader concerns of pre-cinematic visual anthropology.

I could go on at length about both Jenness and Malinowski as photographers, but my main concern here is with the former. While I agree with much of the detail of Wright's contextualization, I question the construction built upon it and the way in which it is used as a mechanism for polarizing the 'old' and the 'new' anthropologies of the beginning of this century. No one would be foolish enough to claim that Jenness was as fine an ethnographer or as visionary an anthropologist as Malinowski, but a different interpretative strategy would perhaps place him on a continuum of developing anthropological method, which underwent a brilliant crystallization with Malinowski. After all, to travel to Paris, as Jenness did, to meet members of the Année Sociologique (Richling 1989: 75) and to elect, in 1911, to do what amounted to individual fieldwork of a year's duration (albeit based at a mission station) does not suggest a man unaware of the changing shape of anthropology. Rather, Jenness's work should perhaps be seen as significant in exemplifying the hiatus in anthropological method between the collapsing evolutionary paradigm and the evolving sociological approach. As Stocking has pointed out (1983: 83-4), this period saw a flurry of intensive survey fieldwork that in many ways formed the basis of the British field tradition.

This contextual reorientation suggests a very different reading of Jenness's photographic work. It seems to me that the crucial contextualizing link here is one that Wright overlooks, that is, the Cambridge Torres Straits expedition of 1898. Marett certainly alluded to it when raising funds for Jenness's expedition (Oxford University Archives: UDC/C/2/4.f.6), and Jenness received advice from members

of it, especially Haddon, Rivers and Seligman, as he made his preparations (ibid.: ff. 55-7). Indeed, Haddon's prescriptions for field photography, which drew on his experience in the Torres Straits, were published in the 1899 edition of *Notes and Queries* (BAAS 1899) that, as Wright points out, Jenness had with him in the field.

Although his methodological approach was more limited than that of the Torres Straits expedition, the latter's influence on Jenness comes across strongly in the photographs. Jenness was attempting to mirror photographically what he hoped would be a systematic survey. This is borne out in both the subject-matter and the style of the photographs. They encompass physical anthropology, social structure, ritual, technology and art; some more successfully than others. The camera does not impose a structure on the subject (Wright 1991: 56) in any overt way; rather, it is the unobtrusive 'snap-shot' style that is striking and significant. It is a gentle, 'unmediated' record of everyday life: the subjects are rarely posed in interventionist terms (see Bateson and Mead 1942: 49-50). On the whole, subjects are relaxed, unconcerned about the camera, suggesting an immediacy, even intimacy on occasion, rather than, as Wright argues, the photographer's physical and cultural distance. For example, there are close-up photographs of funeral ritual, of women making pottery and of people gardening, suggesting a considerable degree of access. There is sometimes a suggestion of the subjects' bewilderment, but seldom the tension of intrusion. Within the limited framework of the fieldwork of the time, Jenness's photographs stand up well. Further, Jenness's photographic account is not a vision of ethnographic purity, but one that acknowledges the operation of historical processes and encounters: for example, the activities of the mission station at Bwaidoga and Jenness and Ballantyne's feeding of starving women and children.

Three of the four Jenness photographs reproduced in Wright's essay (Figs. 1, 2 and 3) cannot be claimed to be representative of his photography, indeed they were not even taken on the northern D'Entrecasteaux Islands; the fourth (Fig. 9) is barely more representative. Certainly, 'anthropometric' photography was one aspect of Jenness's overall agenda, but it is the *only* aspect that fits the polarized model of an anthropological dead-end. The published volume, *The Northern D'Entrecasteaux* (Jenness and Ballantyne 1920) is, indeed, devoid of sociological interest and provides a dispirited record of unsuccessful fieldwork. Perhaps, in this instance, image rather than text should be seen as the lasting legacy of the fieldwork.

I shall not comment at length on Malinowski's photography, for the reinterpretation of Jenness's material and its significance has been my primary concern. However, I should like to make two related observations that might go towards a reorientation of what I should argue is an over-polarized interpretation of Malinowski's photography. Even allowing for very different fieldwork circumstances and anthropological vision, both Jenness and Malinowski used photography in broadly similar ways, in that for both of them photography remained a product of, rather than a part of, the process of fieldwork (see Spindler and Spindler 1967:

x-xii). As Wright points out, Malinowski's diaries are full of references to photography. He *was* interested (though he later denies it (1935: 461)), and the results are good, both technically and ethnographically. Nevertheless, one cannot necessarily equate photographic activity with its being integral to field enquiry. There are hints in the *Diary* that photography was sometimes something of a displacement activity (see, for example, Malinowski 1967: 145, 163, 274, 276), and such a reading is supported by Malinowski's own retrospective assessment of his field method. Thus alerted, we may begin to see patterns emerging in his photographic corpus. Perhaps Malinowski should have the last word here:

> One capital blot on my field-work must be noted; I mean the photographs...I treated photography as a secondary occupation and a somewhat unimportant way of collecting evidence. This was a serious mistake. In writing up my material on gardens I find that the control of my fieldnotes by means of photographs has led me to reformulate my statements on innumerable points...I have committed one or two deadly sins against method of field-work. In particular, I went by the principle of, roughly speaking, picturesqueness and accessibility. Whenever something important was going to happen, I had my camera with me. If the picture looked nice in the camera and fitted well, I snapped it...I put photography on the same level as the collecting of curios—almost as an accessory relaxation of field-work. (1935: 461)

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

I was very interested to read Elizabeth Edwards' comment concerning my essay. I agree with her initial point that scholarship in the area of ethnographic photography has expanded dramatically over the last five years, but would question her interpretation of the photographs in question and her reading of my essay. For example, I think it unfortunate that she collapses my argument into the sort of polarization I had aimed at the outset to avoid. However, Edwards rightly points out that Jenness should have been aware of the wider theoretical debates of his period, though whenever he committed pen to paper (or, in my view, subject to camera) there is little evidence that he was. Nevertheless, there remains a marked difference in the photographic work of Jenness and Malinowski that reflects their overall anthropological standpoints—different, but not exactly polarized. The essay aimed to address some of the factors that may have accounted for this difference.

I agree with Edwards that I should perhaps have placed Jenness's photography in the context of the Torres Straits expedition. But in doing so, my argument would have been reinforced: the photographs resulting from this expedition are accomplished in their use of the available photographic technology and reflect clearly the prevailing anthropological theories. Thirteen years later, Jenness was producing images that are not only less enquiring anthropologically than those

produced by the Torres Straits expedition, but less so than many of the 'snap-shot' images taken by travellers and missionaries of his period. (As historical documents, however, they have accrued a unique value, demonstrated both by Michael Young's recent showing of Jenness's photographs to their subjects' descendants and by the exhibition of Jenness's work at the Pitt Rivers Museum.)

The Samarai anthropometric photographs (taken after his Paris trip!) were included in my essay as examples of Jenness's formative approach to fieldwork, upon which he expanded in his writing. As soon as he arrived at Goodenough, he subjected some additional sixty people to his anthropometric work. I believe, therefore, that the Samarai images remain indicative of his photographic starting-point and demonstrate clearly his initial regard for his subjects.

Finally, whether or not Malinowski found photography as 'something of a displacement activity' has little relevance: his preoccupation with photography remains, and further proof of his enquiring and accomplished use of the medium is evident in the images themselves—as my essay aimed to show. In addition, Malinowski's first fieldwork photographs from Mailu, to which I have recently had my attention drawn by Michael Young, would seem to support my thesis. They are as 'posed and stilted' as Jenness's are dull and uninspired: they too suggest distance from his subjects. In Mailu, Malinowski did not learn the native language and lived, like Jenness, in the missionaries' house. In my view, as marked a change as was to occur in Malinowski's photography, occurred later in Jenness's anthropological career in his Arctic photography, where he too (if, in this context, the metaphor is appropriate) 'stepped off the verandah'.

TERENCE WRIGHT

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