FROM ILLUSTRATION TO PHOTO-ETHNOGRAPHY: PHOTOGRAPHY AS A KEY COMPONENT OF ETHNOGRAPHIC PUBLICATIONS

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Soon after its invention, photography quickly became a common part of scientific method and publication. It met a most urgent need, to hold time still and so reveal what had previously been unseeable.[1] This allowed researchers such possibilities as either to determine if a horse lands on all four legs while running or to document the life of Native Americans from North America, whose culture scientists considered exotic, outdated and doomed to extinction[2]. The rapid rise of scientific photography can be explained by its very nature as a medium thought to capture reality itself and not just a situation artificially created for the camera lens. Each photograph gives the impression that, like most other scientific techniques, it shows what is typical and most characteristic of the photographed subject [Becker 1974]. It is merely a segment of the reality that exists beyond the edges of the photograph. If the camera lens were pointed a few degrees to the left or right, a new photograph would show more of the same.

Despite the fact that photography quickly became an increasingly common part of ethnographic production, the early pictures used by ethnographers[3] rather illustrated the written word and amused the readers than

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[1] The strength of this demand to show the unseen and strange can be illustrated by the practice that had been eliminated by photography, i.e. importing members of distant tribes to Europe and the United States, where they became parts of museum collections or were exhibited as exotic playthings at fairs and circuses [MacDougall 1999: 276].

[2] The first ethnographic photographs were inspired by the very idea of superiority and fascination with otherness.

[3] Although ethnographers used a lot of photographs in their publications, initially, they did not take them themselves. Most of the first ethnographic pictures were taken by colonial officials, missionaries, and travellers and they were not created for research. They became ethnographic because they were used in ethnographic publications to record and understand culture. That is why ethnographers tried to differentiate their publications from popular travel notes and a new genre of photo-essay [Pinney 1992:

conveyed the knowledge [Scherer 1992: 32–33]. In the 1930s, the situation changed and photographs ceased to be considered a natural component of ethnographic books and magazines and almost disappeared. The decline of scientific photography was typical not only for ethnographic publications, but was symptomatic of social sciences in general. In *American Journal of Sociology*, for example, up to 1914 photographs were often included with the published articles, at which point the new editor banned them because they reportedly threatened the theoretical contributions and status of sociology. Stasz states that 50 % of the articles published with photographs were written by women (compared to 12 % of all magazine articles). She concludes that editors associated photography with women; and it was, consequently, dismissed as junk and frivolous stuff [Stasz in Chaplin 1994: 198–199]. Photography was not considered as a sufficiently objective technique suitable for social science literature [Porybná 2010: 11]. On the other hand, Edwards links the disappearance of photography from ethnographic publications with the development of anthropology, which began to emphasize the analysis of social organization considered as indescribable in photographs, which were thought to capture the surface rather than the depth[4] [Edwards 1992: 4].

In the 1970s, photography started to be included in ethnographic books and magazines again[5], mainly due to the criticism of positivism, which opened up new avenues for conducting qualitative research, including the revival of visual anthropology. Today, for some ethnographers, photography has become such a common part of research publications that many of them are criticized for not thinking carefully about the contribution pictures can make to the written text. According to Freeman, photography used by ethnographers is destined to illus-

81]. At the end of the 19th century, anthropological expeditions also included photographers from renowned studios, taking pictures under the guidance of ethnographers. Gradually, more and more ethnographers began taking pictures themselves, and photographers stopped joining their expeditions.

[4] For more information about the development of the relationship between anthropology and photography, see Pinney [1992] who also explains the decline of photography in anthropology by the above-mentioned effort to differentiate scientific publications from travel notes and popular photo-essays.

[5] *Visual Studies* and *Visual Anthropology Review*, the journals strongly oriented on photography, have been founded.

trate the conclusions of the written text and become visually redundant [Freeman 2009: 55]. Similarly, Šimůnek says that the belief in the autonomy of photography in scientific publications has been 'clearly discredited' [Šimůnek 2013: 162].

My goal is to counter these allegations and show how photography can contribute to ethnographic research without being a mere visual notebook. I will focus on the possibilities of its liberation from the legacy of ethnographic photography of the 19th and 20th centuries and on examples of photography reflecting contemporary ethnographic practice. I have chosen three ethnographic publications on homelessness: *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders* by Teresa Gowan [2010], *Righteous Dopefiend* by Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg [2009], and *Good Company* by Douglas Harper [1982][6]. These all differ from similar publications as a result of their focus on photography as part of the presentation of ethnographic knowledge, although they each use their photographs in slightly different ways.
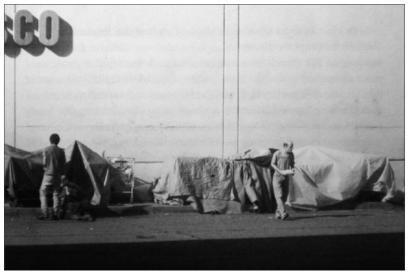
Realism in Photography and its Criticism

For her book *Hobos, Hustlers, and Backsliders* [2010], Teresa Gowan spent several years among the homeless in San Francisco, focusing on those whose main source of income came from the sale of cans and glass bottles which they had collected to recycling centres; an activity which subsequently defined their identity. Gowan illustrates how different discourses on homelessness are linked to different ways of survival and how these strategies are spatially divided. The publication includes 33 photographs taken by Teresa Gowan, most of them with a caption. They can be seen as examples of the realistic approach to scientific photography[7] which treats photography as a record of the observed and

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[6] All monographs I will work with in this text, deal with the American context since no publication using photography in one way or another has been published in the Czech Republic yet.

[7] In scientific or realistic photography, the term 'realism' means a specific approach to photography although the researchers do not describe their approach to taking pictures in the field as realistic. The term is used mainly by its critics to make a point and explain their own approach [see Edwards 1999].

as a mirror of reality [Šimůnek 2013: 158–159]. The idea that a picture is a true representation of reality, regardless of the manipulation of the situation by the photographer, was typical for classical ethnography of the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century[8] [Mydin 1992: 249], i.e. the period of the greatest expansion of ethnographic photography. The experiences and emotions of the author are considered inappropriate, and the presence of the photographer in the resulting pictures should be as little evident as possible. Photographs should be rather reflections than interpretations of what is being photographed [Harper 1994: 404]. The nature of realism in scientific photography has been described by Spindler and Spindler in their preface to *Visual Anthropology* by Collier and Collier [1967].[9] They state that anthropolo-

[Gowan 2010: 91]

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[8] Common genres included portraits in stylized environments and poses required by the photographer or profile portraits in front of uniform backgrounds, later popularized by forensic photography [Pinney 1992].

[9] The book is a classic representative of realism in scientific photography and a crucial publication in visual anthropology and photo-elicitation (for photo-elicitation, see note 12) in social-scientific research. As such, it also led to the revival of the visual in anthropological research [Harper 1994; Pink 2001].

gists do not use photography as a research technique but as an illustration and confirmation of their findings [Spindler, Spindler 1967: x].

At first, Gowan hesitated to carry a camera with her[10], so she took the pictures at the end of her research. By that time, many of her subjects had already moved elsewhere and only few of those who agreed to be photographed were among the key figures of the research [Gowan 2010: xx]. This is evident from the pictures themselves – quite a lot of them were taken from a distance when no one was looking, while others are posed portraits. The intimacy, so often present in the surrounding text and fieldnotes, is lost. Gowan's photographs, unlike the accompanying text, do not show her own reaction to the environment – as if they had been taken by a dispassionate observer, using a realistic approach. The realistic nature of the pictures is emphasized by the streets signs and spaces without people, as if Gowan had merely photographed what she saw on her walks through the city. The realistic photographs, typical of the positivism-oriented scientific approach, in her otherwise high-quality and reflexive ethnographic publication, seem to be taken by someone else for a different research project. Teresa Gowan's text and pictures look like the results of two different research strategies whose data do not overlap, speaking different languages and dealing with different topics.

For Gowan, photographs have rather a minor role, despite their large number, and the focus of her work is in the text. This approach reflects a broader trend typical for early ethnographic photography which treats photographs in publications as a minor research strategy, primarily illustrating typical behaviour of the examined, or as a 'visual supplement' [ibid.]. This is also apparent in other ethnographic publications on the homeless [see Snow, Anderson 1993; Wright 1997; Duneier 1999]. To some extent, this is due to the fact that most ethnographers have much more experience and background in writing than in photography. Pictures are not the main means of interpersonal communication, let alone scientific presentations; so we do not master them as well as we do words[11] [Chaplin 1994: 210].

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[10] It was Gowan's teacher, Gilles Peress, who convinced her [Gowan 2009: 250].

[11] According to Chaplin, the predominance of the written text in all the areas of

New Ethnography and Expressive Photographs

The answer to the inferiority of ethnographic photography may be the criticism of the realistic approach to scientific photography. Realism used to be the dominant, and to some extent, the only approach from the beginnings of scientific photography until the 1970s when new strategies started to appear thanks to the development of visual anthropology. In ethnography, the withdrawal from realistic photography did not begin until the development of new ethnography, which emphasized subjectivity and the fictional nature of the ethnographic narrative. According to Pink, new ethnography tries to experience, interpret, and represent culture and the society, reflecting other disciplines and theories. Ethnography should not be limited to data collection anymore, but should also be process of creating the representation of knowledge based on the ethnographer's personal experience. The aim is no longer to provide an objective vision of reality, but to imprint, as faithfully as possible, the context, negotiation and relationships, through which that knowledge was established[12]. Subjectivity is not seen as something

knowledge is considered as a fact and the visual material, which is part of its presentation, is inferior and assigned the role of illustration. The written text is where we look for arguments or messages for the recipient. But images in the text play a much bigger role than a mere illustration; they are not just mirrors of the reality described in the text. They are based on image codes and social practices associated with them. Chaplin mentions an example of manual for assembling a wardrobe – being a representation, it also displays the wardrobe and the process of its assembly according to certain conventions where some elements of the process are suppressed and some brought to the fore [Chaplin 1994: 3]. Therefore, according to Pink, it is necessary to disrupt the artificial division between the word and image. Similarly, the term of 'visual research method' puts an unnecessary emphasis on the visual as something added to the research [Pink 2001: 17].

[12] Its aim is to change the relationship between the researcher and the researched and push it closer to co-operation [Harper 1994: 407–410]. Photographic approaches, striving for a greater share of insiders in the production of ethnographic knowledge, include photo-elicitation and informant photographs. Photo-elicitation is frequently used by photographing ethnographers, e.g. Bourgois and Schonberg [2009] mentioned below. It is based on interviews conducted over photographs. The pictures are used as the main topic for conversation and stimulate the narrative, and they do not have to be taken by the researcher but may be part of family albums of the informants [Sarkisov, Shevchenko 2011] or historical photographs [Meinhof, Galasinski 2000]. Bourgois and

non-scientific, but as an important part of ethnographic practice. As for photography, the new ethnography brings the experience of the photographer and the photographed subject to the fore, so it is better to talk about the representation of the visible aspects of their experience rather than the record of reality on film or a memory card [Pink 2001: 1–24]. New ethnography can, therefore, be summarised as a step towards experience.

This approach, reflecting the turn to new ethnography and photography, is represented in *Righteous Dopefiend* [2009] by Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg. The publication contains a total of 69 photos, 12 of them before the actual text. The other 57 photos are included in the text, one at a time, and none of them has a caption[13] since they generally capture the situations described in the surrounding pages.

'The photographs were all taken by Jeff. The composition of the images recognizes the politics within aesthetics; they are closely linked to contextual and theoretical analysis. Some photographs provide detailed documentation of material life and the environment. Others were selected primarily to convey mood or to evoke the pains and pleasures of life on the street. Most refer to specific moments described in the surrounding pages, but at times they stand in tension with the text to reveal the messiness of real life and the complexity of analytical generalizations. On occasion, the pictures themselves prompted the writing. Jeff never deliberately staged the actions portrayed in the photographs' [Bourgois, Schonberg 2009: 11].

Schonberg do not use photo-elicitation as a separate method described e.g. by Collier [2009]; to them, photo-elicitation is part of taking the photographs in the field, which are then shown to and consulted with the photographed. Compared to photo-elicitation, informant photography in ethnographic publications on homelessness is an unexplored area, dealt with only in two short essays [Packard 2008; Radley et al. 2010]. This approach completely shifts the role of the creators of the photographs to the studied subjects. They take the pictures at the request of the researcher, who often provides them with cameras, usually for a pre-defined period of time according to the task, e.g. a photo diary of a day in their life [Packard 2008]. Informant photography is usually complemented with interviews over the photographs.

[13] The captions are in the list of pictures at the end of the book.

Bourgois and Schonberg describe their approach as photo-eth-nography. They say that the juxtaposition of the text and photographs helps better understand the impact of the social structures on the individual lives and comprehend the strategies of the actors, which may seem self-destructive and immoral at first glance [Bourgois, Schonberg 2009: 5–9]. They manage to do so, for example, in the above picture of Sonny's visit to a camp where he asked Hank to inject heroin into his neck. Although the surrounding pages contain detailed fieldnotes and the authors also interpret the signification of the actions during the injection and the visit itself, combined with Schonberg's picture, the text achieves a greater specificity. After I read the text, I do not look at the photograph in the same way I had looked at it before; I am able to give the things in the picture a much more specific meaning and the written text seems much richer.

Bourgois and Schonberg deliberately included the pictures within the text for fear of incorrect reading. According to them, the ideology and values of the reader are reflected in the meaning he attaches to the photograph. Therefore, the authors think it is risky or irresponsible to display the images of the marginalized and addicted without any

comments. They insist that the meaning of the pictures could be lost or distorted without the text [Bourgois, Schonberg 2009: 14]. 'Letting a picture speak its thousand words can result in a thousand lies'[14] [Schonberg, Bourgois 2002: 388]. Similarly, MacDougall [1999] sees a photo without a caption as full of uncontrolled potential because it can have any meaning without a text to offer context. That is why Barthes called photographs polysemic. In his conception, each photograph has a number of signifiers, i.e. signs which are part of the picture and of which some can be chosen by the reader while others can be put aside. Therefore, each photograph has a number of possible readings and meanings that can be attributed to it by the readers. The text is then one of the techniques to control the possible readings of the photograph. It becomes a way to answer – at least partially – the question: What is it? It serves not only as an identification of the photographs, but also as the interpretation, and it guides the readers through the image signifiers, allowing them to adopt some of them and avoid some other. Thus it leads the readers to the pre-selected meaning [Barthes 1977: 38–40].

If Bourgois and Schonberg point at the non-obviousness of meaning of scientific photographs, they share the complaints of the critics of realistic photography [Šimůnek 2013]. They understand the meaning of the photograph as not only determined by its visual appearance, but see it also as a process entered into by the photographer, reader, and the context in which the photograph appears. The photographer chooses where to point the camera and when to press the shutter. She/he selects the shot angle, exposure, the image post-processing and the form presentation. However, the photograph depends not only on the photographer's aesthetic and moral decisions, but also on the values and personality of the reader. All of these processes take place in a certain time and environment [Chaplin 1994]. A photograph is not taken as a copy of reality, but as a representation of visual experiences that require critical reading and interpretation by both the author and viewer [Scherer 1992: 32].

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[14] Paradoxically, MacDougall sees this fear as one of the reasons for the decline of photography in ethnographic publications [MacDougall 1999: 289–290].

In terms of visual quality of the photographs, Bourgois and Schonberg's approach can be described as expressive photography which Edwards [1999] tries to establish as a new approach to scientific photography. This approach has been influenced by the critique of realistic photography and reflects the belief that there are parts of culture, which require a much more evocative and comprehensive depiction. Scientific photography as an expressive approach can communicate not only the visible surface, which is everything in realistic photography, but also as a visual metaphor, relying on lyrical expressiveness. Therefore, Edwards in her expressive photography turns to those characteristics suppressed by realism, such as messiness or ambiguity. In this sense, expressiveness is the result of expressing a subjective reaction, making it suitable for the new ethnography, which is trying to bring subjectivity to the fore. The basis for the documentary quality of this approach is the combination of the visible and the invisible, the depiction of the real and specific, but not directly visible [Edwards 1999: 54–59]. This was also the articulated aim of Bourgois and Schonberg's [2012] publication: to make the suffering of homeless drug addicts visible. Therefore, as is evident from the above picture, Schonberg's photographs were taken from a minimum distance. They clearly show the faces and expressions of the homeless,[15] often disarranged and blurred, which reinforces the impression of immediacy, and the reader feels as if they were in the middle of the action. The immediacy makes the photographed situations more dynamic. This is one of the differences from the photographs by Teresa Gowan. The moments she captured, which were either posed or photographed from a greater distance, seem much more ordinary and slower. This is not a problem, but one of the consequences of these differences is that Schonberg's pictures, compared to those taken by Gowan, much better illustrate what it is like to be part of the environment; they mediate the experience.

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[15] Some people even requested to have their faces photographed, saying that if Bourgois and Schonberg did not show them as well, the misery they were experiencing would not be visible [Bourgois, Schonberg 2009: 9–11].

Photography as an Equal Partner of the Text

The last book I would like to mention is *Good Company* [1982] by Douglas Harper. Harper describes the life of American hobos, unsettled people who earn their living by seasonal and manual work, and travel in freight trains. After his previous experiences travelling in freight trains and several weeks on skid row in Boston[16], Harper describes the month he spent travelling and working among hobos. The book includes 52 photographs organized into three sets, two with sixteen and one with twenty pictures. All the photographs are provided with a general caption, mostly indicating the place or situation, such as 'waiting for the harvest; Northern Washington' [ibid.]. The pages with photographs are not numbered, and the text after the photographs continues where it ended as if there were no pictures. Harper does not refer to the pictures in the main text either. Yet they make up a key part of Harper's book. As in Bourgois and Schonberg's publication, the photographs complement the text and can be described as expressive. Since the emphasis on expressiveness is not so strong and the pictures were not taken with a wide-angle lens, the experience of the observed is shown in a different way. Even so, readers, looking at Harper's photographs, sometimes have the impression they can see the situation through the eyes of one of the tramps, while in Bourgois and Schonberg's photographs they rather feel like very close observers. This also corresponds to their different positions in the field: while Schonberg and Bourgois were researchers with an interest in the culture of the homeless drug addicts[17], Harper introduced himself as a writer and photographer [ibid. 146] and became one of the hobos, doing the same things they did for a month[18].

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[16] In the USA, 'skid row' used to refer to mostly segregated urban areas with the poorest population and a number of cheap hostels, canteens and (later) social services, also frequented by the homeless.

[17] Some of them introduced Schonberg as 'their photographer'. Photography also integrated the authors into the environment, many of the observed decorated their homes with their photographs, and when Schonberg was not present, they often said it was a pity Jeff could not come to take pictures [Bourgois, Schonberg 2009: 11–12].

[18] Harper, however, took the pictures and wrote his fieldnotes when he was alone [Harper 1982: 145].

Thus, the main message of some of his pictures is Harper himself and his own experience – for example, in the photograph taken under the wheels of a container chained to an open moving carriage or when Carl served him bread toasted over the fire after a night out.

[Harper 1982]

By dividing the pictures into three separate sets, Harper deals with the problem Bourgois and Schonberg tried to solve by relating the photographs to the surrounding text, i.e. with a number of possible stories created when the reader looks at the pictures. According to Becker, a set of images is one way to deal with this problem. The previous image, the following one, and all the others that the reader has seen or will see, affect the reading of the observed image. The meaning of each picture is created in connection to all the others. According to Becker, the crucial thing is the comparison of the similarities (or differences) of the images. The reader sees the similarities, even if temporarily, as the phenomenon the photoset bears witness to. Since documentary and ethnographic photography usually contains a variety of details,

the reader can make many different comparisons between two images. However, with the gradual increase in the number of the pictures, fewer and fewer original interpretations will be valid and the reader will be more and more confident about what the photoset is about. The key is the photographer and the way he selects and orders the pictures. Thus, some interpretations are brought to the fore and some are side-lined [Becker 1998: 5–9].

In Barthes' concept and Bourgois and Schonberg's book, the text played the same role as the sequencing of photographs in Harper's case. Harper's pictures are much more independent of the surrounding text than those taken by Schonberg – I did not pay much attention to them while reading the text and kept returning to them later, after I had read the surrounding paragraphs. In Harper's book, the pictures are published in sets, so I spent more time looking at them and remembered them more. This is in contrast with most ethnographic publications, where photographs are presented as individual and isolated images, not providing the reader with the necessary information to be able to read them in a meaningful way without text [Freeman 2009: 63]. The authors, e.g. Bourgois and Schonberg, often do not want to present the pictures separate from the body of the text, afraid that another reading than the one they consider to be accurate would be possible. Therefore, I consider Harper's approach a possible response to MacDougall's call for finding ways to use sets of photographs as the basis of ethnographic knowledge in this word-oriented science [MacDougall 1999: 292].

Conclusion

My goal was to show that ethnographic photography does not have to be only an illustration, but may also be an equal partner of the text presenting ethnographic knowledge. Using three ethnographic publications, I have shown that realistic photography, with its emphasis on surface and description, is an inappropriate component of reflexive ethnography, even though many researchers use photography in that way. The distance from the photographed subject, which is part of the realistic approach, sabotages the efforts of ethnographers to present the experience of specific people. Expressive photographs, which origi-

nated as a critique of realism, put an emphasis on subjectivity and the experience of the researcher and the observed. Clarity and the information are sacrificed to expressiveness and immediacy. Photographs taken in this way show what it is like to be part of a specific environment, reflecting the position of the researcher in the field – where we can see the difference between the pictures taken by the researcher/observer and the researcher/active participant. Expressive photographs, bringing the voice of the author to the fore, place more demands on the quality of the pictures. They can have a more independent role than realistic pictures whose meaning is mostly confined to a general illustration or visual supplement. Thus, expressive photographs, as in the case of Bourgois and Schonberg, can enrich the surrounding text, which, conversely, offers a broader context and richer meaning to the photographs. The text and the pictures complement each other. For that reason Bourgois and Schonberg called their book a photo-ethnography. On the other hand, Harper's organization of pictures into separate and uninterrupted sets made the photographs and their meaning independent of the surrounding text. This does not mean, however, that the pictures and the text do not complement each other. Harper's method also puts higher demands on the reader who has to spend more time looking at and thinking about the pictures than if they were provided with additional captions. Their arrangement in a set, uninterrupted by the text, provides a more comprehensive message, compared to the arrangement of pictures in the flowing text. Photography is then used as an autonomous method of data collection and presentation with its own message.

Even though I mention the publications by Bourgois and Schonberg, and Harper as examples of expressive photography and Gowan's approach as realistic, I do not think the realistic approach to scientific photography should be replaced by expressive photography. Both have their place in scientific photography. To criticize realism means to try to free ethnographic photography from its role of illustration and establish it as a more autonomous part of the presentation of research results[19].

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[19] While the author's voice has become a common part of ethnographic film, it has not happened in ethnographic photography yet. [Pinney 1992: 81]

The author should not see the photographs as something fundamentally different from the written text, and the terms 'visual sociology' or 'visual anthropology' should not be limited to adding the 'visual' to the research. This can lead to a contradiction between the form and language of the text and the surrounding pictures, mainly in new ethnography. Therefore, whether we call the desire for a closer connection of the ethnographic text with photography photo-ethnography or not, what is important is the recognition of photography as a meaningful method of data collection and presentation and its equalization with the text.

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