

Cristiane Vigneron-Larosa and Charles A. Chandessais; *Rapport sur l'Analyse de Films* (Report on the Analysis of Films); Paris, France: Institut International du Feu, Centre d'Etude Psychosociologique des Sinistres et de leur Prévention, 1972. 2 vol., 100 pages, French.

In a time when we seem to be drowning in a sea of highly complex and rather tedious methodological techniques the expanded use of photography as an important source of data in sociology is reassuring. Becker has noted that although the birthdates of sociology and photography are nearly identical, the two have rarely been systematically combined. The recent interest in what is called visual sociology is an attempt to alter this fact by using motion pictures and still photography not merely as illustration but as an important source of systematic data (see, for instance, Howard Becker in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* and Deborah Barndt, *Toward a Visual Study of Society*).

Vigneron-Larosa and Chandessais have presented a rather stimulating contribution to this area. Intended as an exploratory analysis of "film documents relating to disasters and panics" the monograph is essentially a methodological treatment of the problems and possibilities associated with the use of pre-existing film documents in the study of crowd movement. The research consisted of a number of stages. After a preliminary analysis of still photographs and motion pictures under simulated conditions, the authors contacted

a number of film distributors. Searching through the distributors' files for films of relevance to the study, the researchers chose several sequences, viewed them, made a final choice of the films to be included and prepared 16 mm copies of the (35 mm) originals selected. The actual analysis followed. Some of the sequences included in the analysis were films of the death and funeral of Brazilian President Vargas in 1954, crowds at various sports events, and gunfire in front of Notre Dame in 1969.

Considerable difficulties accompanied the location and selection of the films. Special permission was necessary in order to gain access to the distributors' files, little information on the content of the films was contained in these files, and because of the fragile nature of the films the researchers were at times forbidden to touch them and were forced to retain a representative of the distributor in order to do so. The reproduction of the film was also associated with a number of difficulties. Copyright laws required letters certifying that the films would neither leave the laboratory, be shown to the public, nor be edited or incorporated into another document. Even with such assurances, the researchers were never permitted to prepare a copy of any film depicting an actual riot. Such problems may be important considerations for all research of this type for it is unlikely that these difficulties are endemic to France alone.

The characteristics of the accessible films also presented difficulties to the researchers. All of very brief duration, the sequences often

suffered from undesirable camera movement and incorrect camera position. "Panning," "travelling," and "zooming," for instance, are camera techniques widely used in filmmaking to achieve various esthetic and informational objectives. However, when the film is to be used as data for the scientific study of crowds a fixed camera is generally most appropriate since it allows a more accurate estimation of such factors as the size, density, contours and movements of the crowd. A raised camera position is likewise important for an adequate measurement of these variables.

Finally, the very fact that the film documents available are motion pictures makes the analysis an arduous process. The authors suggest that still cameras exposed at predetermined intervals would make the analysis somewhat easier. The widely available (35 mm, 2¼" × 2¼") small format cameras with motor drive could be well used in this regard and much of the research in the visual analysis of collective behavior (such as that by Ponting or McPhail) might thereby be simplified. However, to the extent that researchers must rely on pre-existing film documents (e.g., Stark et al., *American Sociological Review*, December, 1974) this is not likely to be an available option.

The analysis itself is divided into two parts. The first consists of what the authors call the "formal analysis." Here they attempt to specify mathematically the types or forms of crowd dynamics and illustrate the variance between these forms by calculations derived for six film sequences. The authors succeed in demonstrating a good deal of precision and sensitivity in their measurements. However, they fail to specify the theoretical significance of these measures. Until such specification is accomplished, the utility of the authors' formal analysis will remain uncertain.

The second portion of the analysis is devoted to what Vigneron-Larosa and Chandessais call the "clinical analysis." This portion consists of

the delineation of the historical context of the given film and the application of existing psychological and sociological theories. The authors warn that the verbal material accompanying the film must be supplemented by a large amount of additional information in order to adequately outline the historical context. They illustrate this process with the films on the death and funeral of President Vargas of Brazil.

Rather than actually applying any psychological or sociological theories to their material the authors suggest means appropriate to such applications. For instance, the difficulty in distinguishing gestures and facial expressions and the subjectivity of subsequent interpretation may be minimized by utilizing "specialists who confront their respective interpretations in the course of group discussion." Another suggested method of interpretation is to use the film as a projective test for "naive" viewers. Certainly the "objectivity" of these methods could be questioned. Nevertheless, they are interesting suggestions which might usefully be applied to several types of visual data.

Visual data have seldom been used in the study of natural and technological disasters. Yet the more fluid nature of such situations lends itself especially to the characteristics of photographic data. Its permanency, for instance, often allows a careful analysis of situations which occurred long before the research question was formulated. And the photograph, although created by an individual, records much more than that individual can when limited to verbal means alone. Vigneron-Larosa and Chandessais have presented a timely methodological essay which should serve to remind us that the scientific study of disasters need not remain an "invisible science."

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