Exchanging photographs: preliminary thoughts on the currency of photography in collecting anthropology

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Introduction

It is quite clear to anyone with a comparative knowledge of photograph collections that the flow of images between scholars and other interested parties, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, was constant and significant¹. This paper is a first exploration of the exchange and collecting of photographs – a consideration of the trade routes through which images became anthropological beyond their content. Although I am concentrating here on the situation within British anthropology at that date, similar exercises could be undertaken in the context of other national schools in, for instance Germany or France with, one suspects, similar results. Further, although reflecting to some extent the particular characteristics of the organisation of science in any given national state and/or colonial power, the material I discuss reflects the way in which networks of collection and exchange amongst individual scholars were truly international, reflecting both the subject matter and international world of scholarship and science. These issues are of more than simply antiquarian interest. Recent interest in the history of collections and in the deconstruction of photographic images has meant that photographs have ceased simply to be photographs «of» things but rather historically specific statements about them, with their own social biography – in other words, cultural objects in their own right. As I have discussed elsewhere², photographs cannot be fully used as evidence without a consideration of their own collections history, the social biography through...
which they make meanings. They are part of the representational machine by which the construction and circulation of images worked alongside that trade routes of colonialism. The focus on content at the expense of historiographical interrogation of the record has meant a partial invisibility of that record or a blindness to some of the other histories such photographs have to tell.

Such a study also points to shifts in both observational rhetoric and institutional paradigms. While the details of this are beyond the scope of this particular paper, further studies of collections history in collections of anthropological photographs will, in the fullness of time, reveal the nuances, ambiguities and points of fracture of that particular trajectory. My focus here is more limited, I shall consider the way in which images were made, collected and exchanged by individual scholars who authored collections of photographs according to their interests and networks. However, these individual collections become intimately related to the development of larger collections – such as that at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, or University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology – as individual scholars donated or bequeathed their collections the central archive where they became absorbed within specific institutional agendas of description, function and usage.

The exchange networks, which became possible through the availability of cheap photographic prints and the increasing ease of photographic technology from about the 1870s onwards, meant an explosion in the circulation of anthropological photographs. This was essential for the development of collections which are now perceived as the homogenised ‘anthropological archive’ which has become a privileged site of critique in recent years, for example through the work of Alan Sekula (SEKULA, 1989), David Green, and others. A study of the way in which exchange systems operated within the intellectual and social networks of late-nineteenth century anthropology suggests not only the archive as palimpsest, but also a much more nuanced and indeed serendipitous development of the « anthropological archive » which was not necessarily based on the « thesaurus of culture » or an undifferentiated appropriative desire. While this later model may work at a discursive meta-level, close consideration shows how it breaks down into smaller, more differentiated and complex acts of anthropological intention in the production, evaluation and flow of images as items of data within anthropological circles.

I shall draw for the most part on examples from three important figures in late nineteenth and early twentieth century British anthropology: E.B. Tylor, who held the first teaching post in anthropology in a British University when he was appointed at Oxford in 1884 as a condition of the Pitt Rivers gift to the University of Oxford; Henry Balfour, first curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, and Alfred Cort Haddon, curator of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and lecturer in anthropology at the University of Cambridge. While they are far from being alone in such activities, they are nonetheless exemplary in the way that photographs flowed ceaselessly around their networks, making meanings about culture. Although I can only give a few examples in support of my thesis in a short paper, they should be understood to be indicative of broader patterns.

There was, of course, an established tradition of exchanging photographic images. In the 1840s and 1850s, this had been concerned with the technical and aesthetic development of the medium amongst early enthusiasts in photography. However by the 1860s, the amateur period was loosing its experimental impetus, and exchange and collection was becoming subject/document based. At one level, the collecting and exchange of images
might be seen as an extension of the classical antiquary’s portfolio of engravings of
classical sculpture or whatever. Indeed photography is now acknowledged as
fundamental in the development of the modern discipline of art history. But the
exchange system also belonged to a developing scientific discourse which linked the
professionalisation of knowledge to the flow of information, the sharing of data and the
maintenance of scientific ‘social’ networks of the emergent anthropological discipline
through reciprocity and exchange. Within this, certain forms of vision emerged as
privileged, in that they met several criteria of, for example, production and use, which
were established by an emerging pool of authorities within the discipline (TUCKER, 1997:
381).

Central and personal

The analogical assumptions about photography in nineteenth century anthropology have
by now been well documented. Photographs closed the space between the site of
observation of the colonial periphery and the site of metropolitan interpretation. The
indexical nature of the medium, the inscription through the action of reflected light on
sensitised emulsion on glass, film or paper, created immutable mobiles through which
information could be transferred in uncorrupted form to another interpretative space
(LATOUR, 1986). They created a form of « virtual witness » – « what I saw, you too will
see » – attesting to the truth value of observation and as a way of amassing analogical
raw data and re-presenting material for interpretation in visual form.

Considerable attention has been given to the learned societies in the development of
anthropology and the collection of anthropological knowledge through the Notes and
Queries publications, the first edition of which came out in 1874. However, as Stocking has
pointed out, there was « a previously unappreciated form... what may be called
"epistolary ethnography" » . Many anthropologists of Tylor’s generation, and indeed
later, postal contact with missionaries, colonial officers and others with anthropological
interests and capable of competent observation answered queries, and supplied
information, and in return Tylor and others would shepherd their papers into print in the
Anthropological Journal or similar specialist journals. Flowing through this vast network,
very often unremarked, were photographs.

There were perhaps two overlapping « trade routes » through which photographs moved.
One must distinguish between them because, although they have since become conflated
in the culture of archiving, their histories, while linked and premised identically on the
immutable mobile and the promise of virtual witness, have somewhat different foci. First
is the centralised collection and centralised projects of photographic collection focused
on the learned and scientific institutions, and secondly the reference collections of
individual scholars which have since been deposited in larger institutional archive
collections.

In Britain, the collecting activities of the Anthropological Institute were, of course,
paradigmatic of the centralising collections made by learned institutions and later by
museums and universities. From the early 1870s onwards, the Institute not only initiated
projects in conjunction with the British Association for the Advancement of Science, but
also regularly received gifts of photographs « of anthropological interest » from other
learned societies and individual scholars. Photographs were regularly shown at meetings.
For instance, in 1883, Richard Buchta’s African photographs were shown; in 1886, Prince
Roland Bonaparte showed his portfolio of portraits of Sami people to the Anthropological Institute\(^{11}\); photographs from Niger were displayed in 1887\(^{12}\) and in 1889 H.O. Forbes’ photographs from his 1887–1888 expedition to the Owen Stanley Range, New Guinea, were exhibited\(^{13}\). A history of this collection is beyond the scope of this paper and in any case has been admirably addressed by Roslyn Poignant\(^{14}\). Suffice it to say, the shape of that collection today reflects the shifts in anthropological thinking over the years; its inclusions and exclusions define the shifting boundaries of the discipline. Yet it is an eclectic and inclusive collection against which one can position the shape of the collections of individual anthropologists and the way those collections reflect the extent of their specific interests.

Given that the boundaries of the anthropological discipline were fluid at this date and that practitioners were not necessarily university-trained or of scientific eminence, it was consistent to the organisation of science that the institutional bases of the subject, the Anthropological Institute and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, were outside the University system. Even if a large number of their officers and membership came from within it, both were still forums in which it was appropriate for anthropological knowledge to be made and exchanged outside the academy in a reciprocal relationship\(^{15}\). This is exemplified in the way in which learned papers elicited photographs. For instance, Balfour actually interleaved off-prints of his articles with written and especially visual responses to his papers from a very wide range of correspondents with anthropological interests. Earlier Thomas Huxley, when facilitating a photographic survey of the races of the British Empire through the Colonial Office in London, received unsolicited « ethnographic » photographs from Formosa, purchased in China, from a Mr W.A. Pye who had heard of the project through a relation in the Colonial Office\(^{16}\). Tylor’s paper of 1879 on ancient games similarly elicited a considerable correspondence with related photographs\(^{17}\). However, amongst scientists themselves, the exchange of photographs appears to be operate at a more intimate level of social connection than that other scientific exchange ritual which emerged in the nineteenth century, the exchange of off-prints.

Such a flow of correspondence points to the way in which the « trade routes » operated as a source for the serendipitous massing of discrete pieces of data for use in the comparative method. The reality effect of photography amassed through the accumulation of images, accentuated the comparative qualities of accounts, gathered with different ethnographic goals and theoretical assumptions, as isolatable units rather than as active parts of a dynamic social system. The nature of photography itself with its fracture of time and space and the way it contains, still within the frame, accentuates this. Thus paradoxically, over the range of photographic practices in which images were produced, single images could work against the differentiating assessments of evidential value which I have outlined\(^{18}\).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the ubiquity of photography by the late nineteenth century, there is very little commentary on it, on specific images or practices when compared with the huge body of material now extant in anthropological photograph collections or archives. The instructions given on photography in, for instance the third edition (1899) of Notes and Queries on Anthropology, the first edition to carry substantial section on photography, provide a post-facto statement of photographic expectation rather than set new agendas for photography. However, there is no clue to the way the trade routes operated within this; rather, the circulation of images is naturalised within...
the relations between the « man on the spot » and the interpreting anthropologists of the metropolitan centres. Much of the evidence is in the dissemination patterns of images themselves and in museum documentation of these images although because of the status of photograph collections within anthropological institutions, this is uneven in coverage and various in its density. There is a little substantiating material in manuscript collections; there is also a certain amount of evidence in the acknowledgement in the published record, but this does not necessarily reveal the precise status of photographs within the implied relationship. The piecing together of small fragments of evidence nonetheless has a massing effect and gives an impression of the level and range of activity in photographic exchange. Some examples from the vast array of possibilities will serve as representative samples:

12 W. Gowland to E.B. Tylor, 14th April 1894:
   A friend of mine has undertaken to procure photographs of groups of wooden figures in the temple at Canton representing the tortures of the Buddhist hades and I hope to receive them some time.

13 Horatio Hale to E.B. Tylor, 12th November 1896:
   I send you a copy [of a photograph of wampum belts]. It is the last I possess, and I must request you be kindly prepared to return it if I should write for it. Otherwise please keep it with the other documents I send. (Ibidem)

14 F.W. Elworthy [Folklorist] to A.C. Haddon, 21st October 1897:
   If you care for them I can send you the original photos. From which these prints were done, as I do not want them any more... You kindly said you could send me photos or slides of corn maidens from Cambridge.

15 Baldwin Spencer to James Frazer, 12th July 1897:
   By the last mail I sent a few photos. To give some idea of what the ceremonies are like which are described in Nature of June.

16 A.M. Fillodean [Sacred Heart Mission, Glastonbury] to A.C. Haddon, 12th November 1902:
   I brought back a certain number of photographs [from New Guinea] as they may be agreeable to you I forward some of them. Be so kind as to accept them in remembrance of one who was delighted with your so learned conversation in New Guinea.

17 Haddon was particularly interested in the role of the visual in ethnography. He had given lectures on photography and folklore, was a keen photographer and active in the exchange of images. There is a particularly interesting correspondence with Otto Finsch on the subject of Melanesian photographs for it indicates not only the exchange of photographs in developing an ethnographic baseline for a region, but also the declining evidential value of certain forms of anthropological photography in the late nineteenth century.

18 In a letter dated 24th May 1893 Finsch writes:
   I send you a rough list which of course only shows the location. But I can give to each Photo a full description on all particulars and these informations [sic] balance the imperfections of many plates. As a whole the collection, never published, reference a lot of interesting types and would be very valuable to the knowledge of Races of men, and for Anthropological and Ethnological Science in general. But according to my experience Science does care very little on such material and its scientific value and so it becomes a useless thing and a source of constant harm to the poor creator regarding to the many costs, not to mention the amount of time and trouble.
A number of interesting points emerge from this passage which substantiate more piecemeal evidence. First, the idea that photographs were integral to other forms of anthropological data and that data emerges from a balanced confluence of different representational forms; here, caption and image. Second, it suggests the shifting truth values accorded to certain kinds of images, where « types » which had dominated much of the anthropological visual discourse in the 1870s and 1880s was beginning to give way to the truth values of observation through the no-style style of photography. I shall return to this issue of shifting truth values in the relationship between photography and anthropology at the end of this paper. Whatever the eventual outcome, one can, I think, safely argue that Finsch photographs entered the general visual discourse through which Haddon was beginning to think through his cultural region of New Guinea in the mid-1890s. Further, Haddon was using some Finsch portraits for photo-elicitation in the northern Torres Strait in 1898. There is a rough sketch in some fragmentary fieldnotes which is a sketch of three Finsch photographs annotated with names and relationships and noting those who had died since the photograph was taken.

While the personal and the institutional existed simultaneously, complimentarily, and to an extent overlapped for much of the late nineteenth century, by the early twentieth century this pattern of photographic use was beginning to give way to a valuation of photographic evidence; this privileged the residue of individual field experience over the collected portfolios of photographic evidence which exactly mirrors the development of the primacy of individual fieldwork over the serendipitous collection of examples of isolated phenomena for the purposes of comparative study. However, Patrick Wolfe’s recent claim that the development of the relationship between anthropology and photography shifts from collecting to observation is too disingenuous, for it overlooks the function of photographs within certain parameters of scientific knowledge-making in the late nineteenth century. Collection, in effect, constituted observation by the virtual. However, as I have already suggested, there was not necessarily a naive acceptance or objectivity attached to photographs in that meaningful representations in late nineteenth century anthropological science did not happen automatically but were made through group massing of certain forms of images which flowed through the exchange networks.

This emerges strongly in a letter written by Henry Balfour, Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, to Baldwin Spencer in Australia soon after the latter’s return from fieldwork in central Australia with the 1896 Horn Expedition. Balfour is anxious to get a set of photographs:

Baldwin Spencer to Henry Balfour, 20th September 1897:

It was very kind of Horn to promise you Anthrop. photos... But they don't belong to him but to Gillen who handed them over on the distinct understanding that copies were not to be given away without permission. However we can let you have some much better ones.

In the interim Balfour clearly approached Gillen, keen to get the photographs, but clearly to no avail.

Henry Balfour to Baldwin Spencer, 23rd September 1898:

I wrote to Gillen some time ago asking him if he could very kindly let me have photographs of his natives especially such that deal with arts, customs etc. I have not heard from him & I dare say he is far too busy to attend to ‘begging letters’... Photos. I find are so important an adjust to a Museum that I try to beg all I can for as series I am making for the Museum. My funds don't allow of my buying many in the open market, & the trade ones are apt to be unsatisfactory & made up (ibidem).
A number of significant points emerge in this letter: first, the implication of the privileging of the record of the man of science on the spot; second, a specific assessment of the « truth value » of different kinds of images; third, the prevalence of copying and exchange; fourth, the interpenetration of personal and institutional interests in the building of collections; and finally, perhaps this correspondence hints at the shifting of the photographic from the centralised endeavour to the production of material specific to a body of fieldwork.

Material culture

I want to look briefly at the main sources and foci for the exchange and collecting of photographs. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the analogical nature of the medium and the detailed surface mapping of the photograph, material culture was the field where photographic exchange was most active and longest lived. Photographic material of all sorts was gathered into a given research project.

Photography was integral to the development of an ethnographic baseline in the nineteenth century. This was certainly so amongst scientists within anthropology itself. Photographs were displayed, swapped, collected, made for collectors locally and were active participants in the making of meanings around material culture and culture. Photography was part of the description and delineation of areas, and anthropological analysis practised on such photographs fed back into the making of meaning in a mutually sustaining relationship. It is significant that a major gift to the Pitt Rivers Museum, or more precisely to Professor Tylor and Professor Moseley who were in charge of the collection during the years immediately following the Museum’s founding in 1884, consisted, in large part, of photographs. Each was presented with a duplicate set of around 80 images and accompanying objects, mainly pottery from the Pueblo peoples of the US Southwest and some Plains material.

It is very clear that in this instance and probably others, was a grey area between collecting for an institution, a centralised resource, and collecting for personal research. Likewise, Haddon differentiates between material culture collected for his own collection and that for the Museum in Cambridge. However, because photographs were reproducible forms, perceived as pieces of information, the tensions were resolved through copying and exchange. Indeed, the vast number of copy negatives of photographs dating from the early part of the century in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum would point to this.

It is often not easy to get a sense of the precise way in which photographs were used. Tylor was clearly trying to read detailed data off photographs of Iroquois wampum belts sent to him by Horatio Hale in 1896, in order to consider meanings in his Anthropological Institute paper on the subject.

Horatio Hale to E.B. Tylor, 12th November 1896:

I see you say that you have failed to find these oblique lines on pictures of other belts. When I had the photograph (which I think you have) of the six high-chiefs who explained their wampum records to me, I had at the same time a photograph made of the belts. It is not very clear, but sufficiently so for this purpose.

One gets a very clear impression of the use of photographs in material culture in a substantial range of purchased and exchanged images which Haddon gathered together for his work of shield types of the Papuan Gulf.
In one photograph in particular, of three Elema men at Maiva with archers' shields, one can actually see in action Haddon’s work on both decorative art and, later, shields from New Guinea. Significantly, it is also a photograph owned by Tylor and acquired through the same trade route, yet Haddon’s remained more ‘performative’ in terms of making meanings. The designs, traced off the shields appear in *Decorative Art of British New Guinea*. A tracing survives of Lawes’ Elema shield photograph which can be matched to a photograph of specimens from the Glasgow Museum in Haddon’s collection. Within this series, field photographs, museum object photographs and even press cuttings are given an equivalence of value. Tracings were made, photographs cut in half, backgrounds standardized with blank-out pen. Photographs were also written on, coloured, and overpainted. Clearly this was more than merely *looking* at photographs. The photographs obtained by collection and exchange became active, physical tools in making, literally constructing, anthropological meaning through material intervention with the surface. The ample footnotes in *Decorative Art* testify to the long-standing of this method which is not dissimilar to that of art historians of the Renaissance at the same date. I have dwelt on this example, which is mirrored in other series, such as that on stone clubs, because the function of the photographs is made visible through the marks to its surface, front and back. They do not depict anything in terms of content as such, but add to the image as a functional object.  

If photographs were exchanged between the periphery and the interpreting centres, they were also active in the shared space between colonials and anthropologists/collectors in the field. For example, C.S. Seligmann, when in British New Guinea in 1898, stayed with A.C. English, Government agent of Rigo district, who gave him photographs for data Seligmann was collecting on *dubu* platforms. During the same expedition, Haddon worked on the extensive collection of stone clubs belonging to David Ballantine, the Customs Officer in Port Moresby. Ballantine arranged to have stone clubs photographed for Haddon as part of the project. Eight images survive in Haddon’s file on stone clubs of southern Papua, and it is clear that the making of the photographs was central to the taxonomical expression of the club analysis. The contents were arranged by type against a light backdrop in order to project the taxonomic information visually. This relationship might be seen as an exchange relationship in that photographs are integral to the exchange and dissemination of ethnographic data.  

However some of the Torres Strait Expedition’s own field photographs enter the exchange system on their return home. For instance, Haddon sent Henry Balfour, of the Pitt Rivers Museum, a full set of the pottery making series apparently relatively soon after the return of the Expedition. These were still active in making meanings within the Museum in the 1930s when they were integrated into a typological series on ceramic technology and thus were absorbed into the museum’s representational systems. Shown with objects in the museum’s displays, such photographs become active in the economy of truth in the museum’s public spaces and are thus launched on yet another trajectory of institutional meaning.  

What is significant in this exchange system, beyond the consolidation of relationships and the consolidation of data, is that that material in circulation was active in the making of meanings about cultures. They represented believable statements within a certain paradigm. Thus, as the New Guinea pottery photographs entered the Pitt Rivers collection as a type series, the two series, from the village of Hanuabada and a series made in Ballantine’s compound conflated to make meaning, arranged on a card carefully...
captioned with the narrative of pottery making. This mirrors, visually, the process of ethnographic production where multiple happenings are conflated to make a generalised statement of cultural behaviour.

These are just some examples which represent a general pattern. Again, it is often difficult to track this kind of exchange for it is seldom written about, and even then it is often little more than a chance remark. What I am arguing is that the collecting of images and their trade routes are integral to the making of meaning of collections of material culture at this date; they not only documented in a primary sense, but reproduced those visual registers through which objects were understood.

**Commercally produced material**

As is well acknowledged, anthropologists had also absorbed commercially produced material into their collections. Even though the critical evaluation of material in the British context excluded much travel photography, the dominance of analogical value of subject matter over photographic style allowed a slippage between both contexts of production and photographic aesthetics. It would seem that anthropologists had a knowledge of commercial photographers working in the ethnographic genre. For example, many anthropologists with an interest in Melanesia had photographs by the missionary W.G. Lawes as well as photographs from Lindt’s *Picturesque New Guinea*, 1884, which was available as a bound volume or as loose prints (or indeed his earlier work, studio portraits of Clarence River Aboriginals). Thus, both Balfour and Haddon collected Thomas Andrew’s studio portraits of Samoan men and women which became absorbed into the discourse of type within anthropological evaluation despite that fact that they were produced for a tourist market in exotica.

What is significant is the way in which the dominant noise of the content suppressed differences in photographic style and intention through a privileging of content over form in the making of meaning. This was, of course, an historically specific evaluation which was linked to what was available. Therefore, Tylor was able in 1876 to praise the Dammann album comprised of a mixture of commercially and scientifically produced material in a variety of formats as « one of the most important contributions to the science of man », and furthermore use a number of them as the basis of engravings in his 1881 volume *Anthropology*.

Commercial dissemination did not necessarily mean the image was produced within an uncomplicated commercial environment. Perhaps the most widely disseminated example of work of this category is that of Rev. W.G. Lawes, the distinguished London Missionary Society man who worked for many years in the region of Port Moresby, New Guinea. He took up photography in the early 1870s and by the late 1880s was selling his photographs through Henry King in Sydney, who published a catalogue listing of the photographs divided into section « General », « Missionary » and « Anthropological » . We are fortunate that copies of these lists survive in the collections of both Tylor and Haddon. There is a clear confluence of interests in the way that both anthropologists selected images from both the « general » and « anthropological » sections. Their interest was in the appearance of pristine culture. Haddon’s comments survive and it is clear from the list in which he gave negative numbers and commented on the images, that he values photographs which show clear « physical type » and tattoo patterns, followed by those that display elements of material culture to the camera, in a couple of instances he
actually notes that the subjects were wearing European clothing. Further, they can be related directly to his collecting interests in British New Guinea in that they illustrate the characteristics of both physical and material culture that he used to define his anthropogeography of the region. As we have seen, Haddon actively engaged with this image in his work on Papuan Gulf shields. In *Decorative Art of British New Guinea*, he exhorted other anthropologists to buy them.  

The Rev. W.G. Lawes, of Port Moresby, has taken a large number of most excellent photographs illustrating Papuan ethnology, and he has generously deposited the negatives with Mr. H. King, George Street [sic], Sydney N.S.Wales, in order that anthropologists might have the opportunity of purchasing authentic photographs.  

Haddon also cited Lawes’ photographic list published by Henry King as identification for the shields themselves. Sold through Kings of Sydney, they were used as the basis for engravings illustrating Rev. William Turner’s « Ethnology of Motu » published in the *Anthropological Journal* of 1878, and can be found in most major ethnographic collections.  

Henry Balfour bought a whole set of ethnographic photographs from the German Trappist Mission at Marianhill, Natal, in 1896. The same set was bought by, for instance, Küppers-Loosen, a Köln businessman with strong geographic and ethnographic interests whose collection now forms the historical core of the photograph collection at Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum. Other photographers who were extensively collected as data in the late nineteenth century were, for example, Beattie, Martin, Dufty, King, Kerry and Tattershall in the Pacific and Australia, Middlebrook, Caney, Lloyd in Southern Africa, Lisk-Carew in West Africa and Zangeki in North Africa.  

Clearly part of the exchange system was looking at other anthropologist’s collections. Haddon papers include sketches of photographs which can be identified as being by Thomas Andrew in Samoa and Josiah Martin in Fiji, both dating from the 1890s. Baldwin Spencer wrote to Balfour that he is sorting out the photographs left behind by Haddon and Balfour after the 1914 British Association Meeting in Australia and will be returning them in due course. It is clear from the references and acknowledgements in published sources, from scribbled addresses (a torn card from a Royal Irish Academy meeting with Kerry’s Sydney address scribbled on the back survives in Haddon’s papers) and from photographers’ prospectuses that the knowledge of reliable sources of commercial material in the ethnographic genre was part of the flow of information within the scientific exchange system.  

### Lantern Slides

Lantern slides formed a crucial element of the exchange system. In broad terms, it was through lantern slides that photographs left the study and became active performers in the dissemination of anthropological meaning. A vast amount of work remains to be done on lantern slides themselves, however one can track the movement of some of these images into wider anthropological discourses. Turned into lantern slides, photographs were active in making meanings at a broad level, impressing specific figurations of a cultural reality on students and audiences at scientific meetings. Further, like published photographs working with text, they had an «affective tone» in the broader culture of representation within anthropology.
For instance, throughout his life, Haddon gave public lectures, and it was through them that not only photographs from his own fieldwork, especially those of a more « primitivist » appearance, but also that of material from the exchange networks were disseminated. Haddon had lantern slides of some of Otto Finsch’s photographs for instance and commercial photographs such as those from R.W. Welsch, the Belfast photographer with whom Haddon shared an interest in Irish ethnography. It would appear that Seligmann used the dubu photographs given to him by English (see above) as lantern slides to illustrate his paper on the houses and dubu of British New Guinea at the Dover BAAS meeting in September 1899. Tylor had lantern slides of some of the Bureau of American Ethnology gift of 1886 made into lantern slides by Henry Taunt of Oxford, the leading local photographic firm at that period. Haddon borrowed photographs from the missionary ethnographer Dauncey to make lantern slides in the 1900s and Beatrice Blackwood in Oxford was borrowing photographs from Haddon, and vice versa, to make slides as late as the 1930s. Indeed, it would appear that the making of lantern slides was one of the main reasons for the loan of photographs (as opposed to the exchange) within this general network of exchange and reciprocity.

However, it would also appear that the act of showing lantern slides was also part of the general exchange and flow of anthropological data, almost an act of scientific courtesy. The reciprocal nature of this is very clear in the case of David Ballantine, the customs officer from Port Moresby. When members of the Torres Strait Expedition visited the Gulf region, they were entertained on a number of occasions by lantern slide shows of material of local interest; for instance Ballantine showed local lantern slides to the expedition members after dinner one evening. Sometimes lantern slide shows included local people in the audience. The Torres Strait expedition were consciously using photographs and lantern slides in an exchange role in Mer, eastern Torres Strait, and the same thing happened in New Guinea:

In the evening Ballantine gave them [the Papuan people] a lantern show in the boat house – interspersed with phonograph songs and tunes by Ray. I think they did not take to the latter – but the pictures were thoroughly appreciated by them.

When Ballantine was due to return to England on leave, Haddon wrote to his wife from Port Moresby:

B[allantine] has a lot of N.G. Lantern slides. Speak to Ridgeway ab[out] him & see if the Camb[ridge] Ant[ropological] Soc{iety} w[ould] like a show – This could be arranged when B writes to you... Please show B all my lantern slides & especially the Folklore ones wh[ich] you can easily explain to him... & ask R[idgeway] to show B the anthrop[ological] slides.

At one level, the lantern slide shows can be seen as an extension of the replication and virtual witnessing which was central to the exchange networks themselves. They also shifted anthropological images, whatever their origin, into a performative space in a way which became increasingly significant in the making and reproduction of anthropological meaning with the rise of university based anthropological teaching in the early years of the twentieth century.

**Shift in truth value**

If, by the First World War, there was a shift in the valuation of photographic material within British anthropology, how did this manifest itself within the exchange of images...
along the networks involved in the making of anthropological knowledge? As the focus of anthropological activity, at least in its theoretical character, moved towards the university departments rather than the museums and learned societies, the idea of photographs as a centralised resource began to decline. If the exchange of images was constituted by the cultural expectancy of photographic truth value and analogical veracity, along with the free flow of information amongst the anthropologically minded, the gradual decline in the flow of images, solicited or unsolicited, along « trade routes » as currency of information can be written in terms of a professionalizing and increasingly exclusive disciplinary self-definition in British anthropology. Related to this is a shift in the idea of valid data. Isolated pieces of information, both in terms of observation and photographic expression, and a massing effect of comparative data which had informed definitions of culture premised on the positioning of data within an evolutionary, or at least progressivist model, gave way to an increasingly integrated model of social structure for which the photograph was a less satisfactory mode of recording and expression.

49 As photographs moved from the process to the product of fieldwork, so they moved from a « public » sphere to a private one. This was not in terms of a private collection in the way that Tylor or Haddon had developed it, but the relation of a body of photography to a specific fieldwork endeavour, private like field notes, rather than a shared resource depositing sets of images with key institutions, as I have suggested, this may be at the root of Gillen's reticence to circulate his photographs. This changed radically the role of photography in the making of generalised meanings, outside the published record and the lecture theatre. Furthermore, as depth rather than surface became the perceived goal of the anthropologist, the realist insistence of photography appeared increasingly irrelevant to the concerns of modern, functionalist anthropology.

50 At the same time, the shifting truth value of anthropological observation, onto the individual fieldworker making extended and concentrated observation in the field, made photographs produced in such contexts increasingly desirable within those institutions becoming increasingly marginalised in intellectual terms. This is illustrated by Balfour's anxiety to acquire photographs from Spencer and Gillen's work in central Australia which I quoted above. As Finsch's letter to Haddon points to the shift away from the mapping of physical types alone towards a more culturally articulated form of field photography, so Balfour's privileging of scientific men in the field over other forms of images making points to a shift away from the more fluid slippages between photographic dialects that had characterised the earlier period.

51 While in the twentieth century within the ethos of individual fieldwork in the British school, photographs remained in the private domain, being specific to a fieldwork endeavours. They were not, on the whole, widely circulated, but remained within the private domain of individual research and publication until they had outlived their usefulness and were archived, thus becoming « public domain » or centralised resource. Here, the archiving of the collections of Malinowski at the London School of Economics and Evans-Pritchard at Pitt Rivers Museum are typical of this trend. Once in the archive, however, they assume aspects of equivalence through homogenising discourses of precisely those institutional practices which absorb the earlier material with which I have been concerned. One could argue that, as photographic material ceased to have such a central role in the collective making of anthropological knowledge, its exchange value declined.
Thus one can argue that the rejection of nineteenth century ways of acquiring photographs was not merely because of what they « showed » (or did not « show »), but how the process of production of photographs was linked to shifting evaluation of the nature of the production of evidence and changing modes in the transmission of that information.

Conclusion

The exchange of images relates to larger questions of the production of anthropological knowledge in the late nineteenth century, at which I have only been able to hint in this paper. If reality constructions are a mosaic formed by fitting together observations according to their content, the shape of recording, selection and dissemination is crucial. Of course, relics of the past are cultural artifacts of the moments that produce them, but they are cultural artifacts of all the moments that give them permanence. If we accept that this is so of anthropological photographs, then their collections history, the way they were collected, the meanings attributed to content, how they were used and the contemporary status of the photograph’s creators and owners, these constituent parts of the social biography of photographs are crucial to the history of the photographs and their role in the history of anthropology. This essay can claim to be only introductory to such a vast field, however, I hope I have highlighted an area for future research which will enable us to have a better understanding of the role of photographs in late nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropology built on solid ethnographies of photographic collections rather than assumptions about the nature of the archive.

As Greg Dening has argued so cogently, history is texted not only by its documents but through the contexts and histories of the preservation and use of those documents through time and space. I hope I have suggested, through looking at the trade routes or networks through which photographs moved, to have pointed at ways in which they might be used to understand the processes through which meanings were made in anthropology at the beginning of this century.

NOTES

1. I am most grateful to Joan Schwartz for her discussion of the methodological issues and close reading of the text and to my colleagues who, aware of my interests, have noted comments and contexts relating to photography as they find them and passed them on to me to add to the massing effect of evidence in this area of research. In Oxford, Jeremy Coote, Gwyneira Isaac, Chantel Knowles, Christopher Morton and Alison Petch and in Cambridge Hermione Cornwall-Jones, Anita Herle and Jude Philp.
18. For a discussion of these ideas, the tensions between the specific inscription and the « cascade », see LATOUR (1986 : 19).
22. Haddon Papers, Envelope 3066, Cambridge University Library. Haddon had visited the Sacred Heart Mission at Yule Island, Papuan Gulf, while on the Cambridge Torres Strait Expedition in 1898.
23. One such lecture is summarised in Folklore, 1895, VI : 222-224.
24. Haddon Papers, Envelope 4, Cambridge University Library.
27. TUCKER (1997). The concerned papers presented to the Anthropological Institute in the 1890s also reflects those debates. Notable were the contributions of Everard Im Thurn and M.V. Portman concerning contested photographic styles within anthropology. See Poignant R., 1992. « Surveying the Field of View », op.cit., and EDWARDS (1998b).
28. Spencer Papers, Box IV, Pitt Rivers Museum Manuscript Collections.
29. Indeed it would appear that Balfour only ever got limited access to Spencer’s photographs in unpublished form. While he undoubtedly saw them in Australia in 1914, there do not appear to be any in Balfour’s own collection. The series in the Pitt Rivers Museum were donated by Spencer’s daughter in 1932, a couple of years after Spencer’s death.
30. Like the making of material culture collections, photograph collections can reflect local social structures at the site of making the photographs in that it can influence who or what is photographed in the way in which it reflects the relationship between the photographer and the community.
31. Although I have differentiated between centralised and personal collections, there was in fact often a grey area between what was personal and what was being given to the institution, especially in the emerging anthropology departments at Oxford and Cambridge. Although duplicate sets of Native American photographs were given ostensibly to the Museum, Moseley’s set was not actually deposited until after his death as he had kept it in his personal collection.
33. Tylor Papers, Box 12, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.
34. Haddon Papers, Envelope 2024, Cambridge University Library.
36. Haddon Paper, Envelope 3034, Cambridge University Library.
37. Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford Photograph Collections PRM C1.12.6a-g, 7a-g, 8a-k. Balfour also received a set of photographs of tattooing process (PRM C12.17). The prints are made on a very similar print-out-paper to that of the contact prints in Wilkin’s own personal albums of the expedition photographs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Probably a gaslight paper judging from the tonal range.
42. The selection of the Lawes photographs would appear to reflect the broader visual recording of Torres Strait Expedition’s in the Papuan Gulf. For Haddon’s analysis of the region, see Haddon A.C., 1900. « Studies in the Anthropogeography of British New Guinea », Geographical Journal,16 : 265-291, 414-441.
45. A set of Kerry’s lantern slides of Aboriginal rituals and social life has recently been identified at the Pitt Rivers Museum as belonging to Radcliffe Brown. The slides are accompanied by Kerry’s catalogue list marked up in Radcliffe Brown’s hand. Presumably, these images of pristine culture were used to illustrate lectures on the social organization of Australian tribes.
46. Overall, one sees the massing of anthropological value around certain bodies of images. An important related study would explore the significances of the overlaps and duplications between collections of anthropology or ethnographic photographs rather than the singularities of collections.
47. Welsch was also active within anthropology. He was closely involved with trying to collect data, including photographs, for the British Association for the Advancement of Science Ethnographic Survey of the British Isles in the 1890s. He was also one of the commercial photographers to register his photographs in a register of material « of anthropological interest » which was run for a few years by the Anthropological Institute in the late 1890s, organised by J.L. Myres at Christ Church College, Oxford.
49. A lantern slide acknowledged to WHR Rivers in Blackwood’s collection is one of the few fragments of evidence that he was also taking photographs on the Torres Strait Expedition of 1898.
51. Haddon Papers, 1898 Diary : 141, Cambridge University Library. Sidney Ray was a London school master and expert on Melanesian languages who went as the linguist on the Torres Strait Expedition. I have explored lantern slides in this cross cultural relation in Edwards, 1998a, and in Edwards E., forthcoming. « Surveying Culture: Photography and the Collection of Culture,
ABSTRACTS

This paper explores the way in which photographs operated as exchange objects within the interpretative community of emerging anthropological practice in the second half of the nineteenth century. Photographs became socially salient objects, enmeshed with a visual economy which reflected complex and wide-reaching scientific and social networks. At the same time, shifts in collecting interests and the scientific value accorded to certain kinds of images emerges as another way of tracing disciplinary shifts within anthropology. The study of history of collecting suggests that the « anthropological archive », which has in recent years been a privileged site of critique, was more ambiguous, nuanced and complex than such an homogenising model suggests. Although concentrating on British material, the paper presents an approach also applicable within other national or colonial traditions.

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Mots-clés: anthropologie, archives, collection, histoire, photographie

Keywords: anthropology, collecting archives, history, photography
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