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# **SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL**

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## Content

# **SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL**

## *Question Bank – (Previous Year Solved Question Papers)*

Question Paper–June–2023 (Solved) .....	1-2
Question Paper–December–2022 (Solved) .....	1
Question Paper–Exam Held in July–2022 (Solved) .....	1
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved) .....	1
Sample Question Paper–2 (Solved) .....	1
Sample Question Paper–3 (Solved) .....	1

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<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
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### **BLOCK-1 : INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE VISUAL**

1. Understanding Society Through the Visual.....	1
2. Making Sense of Visuals.....	14

### **BLOCK-2 : SOCIOLOGY AND THE PRACTICE OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

3. Image Making Through Photography.....	29
4. Photography, Self and Society.....	48
5. Photography as a Tool of Research.....	62

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
--------------	-----------------------------------	-------------

### **BLOCK-3 : VIDEO AND FILM IN SOCIOLOGY OF SOCIETY**

6. Representing Through Video and Film.....	77
7. Film and Video as Research Tool.....	92

### **BLOCK-4: SOCIOLOGY, MULTIMEDIA AND HYPERMEDIA**

8. Society, Multimedia and Hypermedia.....	107
9. Multimedia and Hypermedia as Tools of Research.....	121



# **Sample Preview of the Solved Sample Question Papers**

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# QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

## SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL

B.S.O.S.-185

Time: 2 Hours ]

[ Maximum Marks: 50

Note: Answer any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

**Q. 1. Name the two films made by Robert Flaherty. What is unique about these films? Discuss.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-1, Page No. 6, Q. No. 6 and Page No. 2, 'Development of Films and Photography in Anthropology'.

**Q. 2. What does David MacDougall mean by the phrase 'Whose Story is it'? Explain.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-1, Page No. 7, Q. No. 11 and Page No. 4, 'Shifts in Theory and Filming Methods'.

**Q. 3. What does photography represent according to Bourdieu? Discuss.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-4, Page No. 48, 'Understanding Society Through Photography' and Chapter-1, Page No. 8, Q. No. 17.

**Q. 4. What does Hashup mean by the phrase 'blow up effect'?**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-2, Page No. 25, 'Visual Sociology'.

**Q. 5. How are family photographs used by Geraldine Forbes to talk about women?**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-2, Page No. 15, 'History and Visuals'.

**Q. 6. What do you understand by the term direct cinema?**

**Ans.** Direct cinema is a documentary genre that originated between 1958 and 1962 in North America – principally in the Canadian province of Quebec and in

the United States – and was developed in France by Jean Rouch. It is a cinematic practice employing lightweight portable filming equipment, hand-held cameras and live, synchronous sound that became available because of new, ground-breaking technologies developed in the early 1960s. These innovations made it possible for independent filmmakers to do away with a truckload of optical sound-recording, large crews, studio sets, tripod-mounted equipment and special lights, expensive necessities that severely hog-tied these low-budget documentarians. Like the *cinéma vérité* genre, direct cinema was initially characterized by filmmakers' desire to capture reality directly, to represent it truthfully, and to question the relationship between reality and cinema.

"Direct cinema is the result of two predominant and related factors – The desire for a new cinematic realism and the development of the equipment necessary to achieving that desire" (Monaco 2003, p. 206). Many technological, ideological and social aspects contribute to the direct cinema movement and its place in the history of cinema.

Direct cinema was made possible, in part, by the advent of light, portable cameras, which allowed the hand-held camera and more intimacy in the filmmaking. It also produced movements that are the style's visual trademark. The first cameras of this type were German cameras, designed for ethnographic cinematography. The company Arriflex was considered the first to widely

commercialize such cameras, that were improved for aerial and battlefield photography during World War II. Easily available, portable cameras played an important part, but the existence of these cameras in itself did not trigger the birth of direct cinema.

The idea of cinema as an objective space has been present since its birth. The Kino-Pravda (literally “Cinema Truth”) practice of Dziga Vertov, which can be traced back to the 1920s, gave an articulated voice to this notion, where one can also see the influence of futurism.

Before the 1960s and the advent of direct cinema, the concepts of propaganda, film education and documentary were loosely defined in the public. Cinema in its ontological objectivity was seen by many

viewers as reality captured and a means of universal education, as had been photography in its early period. Documentaries from the 1950s provide insight into the level of understanding that viewers of that day had of manipulation and *mise-en-scène* in films shot on “documentary sets.” Direct cinema gained its importance in the perspective of the popular evolution of ideas about reality and the media.

**Q. 7. What do you understand by the ‘Softly-Softly’ approach in image based research?**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-4, Page No. 55, Q. No. 5 and Page No. 51, ‘Tactics of Visual Data Collection’.

**Q. 8. Explain the term ‘hypermedia’.**

**Ans. Ref.:** See Chapter-8, Page No. 109, ‘Hypermedia’.



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# **Sample Preview of The Chapter**

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# SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL

## BLOCK-1 : INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE VISUAL



## Understanding Society Through the Visual

### INTRODUCTION

All cultures share the visual features of society as an essential component. Visuals are present in every aspect of modern culture and are a part of our daily activities. With the development of technology, we have seen more types of visual media, including photos, movies and video clips. These visual forms have gotten more and more ingrained in our daily lives as social media platforms have grown and they have an impact on our cultures and identities. Because they are so ingrained in every aspect of our social interactions, pictures present a significant study opportunity, particularly for ethnographic studies. It is challenging to separate pictures from ethnographic study. Images, like sounds, words, or any other kind of cultural expression are essential to ethnography (Pink 2001).

The methods that the ethnographer “sees” and observes a culture are what the ethnographic examination of societies is all about. The process of “visualising”, what is observed results in the data collection and interpretation processes. This process of perceiving leads to the field of visual anthropology. “Seeing” must be understood in the broader perspective of anthropological theory of advancements.

### CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

#### WHAT IS ETHNOGRAPHY?

Ethnography, according to Pink (Pink, Sarah. 2013), is “a methodology and an approach to experiencing, interpreting and expressing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of diverse disciplinary objectives and theoretical ideas.”

The process of producing and disseminating knowledge (about society, culture and people) is known

as ethnography. It is founded on the experiences of realities that “are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and inter subjectivities through, which the knowledge was formed that ethnographers have encountered” (Pink, 2013: 18). Every ethnography contains certain visual elements. The visual can be defined as the study of objects, movements, facial expressions, or any component of spatial behaviour.

Visual includes what we see and don’t see. Some societal characteristics are so common that we don’t notice them. Gender inequality issues include domestic division of labour, gender binary and heteronormativity. Heteronormativity views man-woman sexual relationships as normal and preferred. It assumes only men and women, eliminating others.

Feminist and sexuality movements make these challenges evident to society.

Visuality and power are intertwined. The normative is visible and the marginal is invisible. The researcher ‘sees’ the visible and ‘invisible’ in the field, including artefacts, everyday behaviours, rituals, etc. Written ethnographies helped us ‘see’ and visualise cultures. Sometimes images and films accompanied the text.

#### The Role of Technology

As technology advanced and cameras got lighter, the practices of filming and taking pictures became more popular. When they were first invented, cameras and camera reels were large, expensive and unable to record sound. With the development of technology, cameras could now record, both sound and images. Cameras and recorders are now easier to use and are more economical, thanks to digital technology.

This helped visual anthropology develop as a field of study within anthropology. Today, when we talk about visual anthropology, we generally refer to images and ethnographic media.

### What Kind of Visuals can be Considered Visual Ethnographic?

Home films and personal photos have been created by people for a very long time. Are these photos and videos ethnographic as well? Do documentaries count as ethnographic films as well? Or should we simply confine our comprehension of ethnographic movies and images to those produced by anthropologists?

According to Heider (2006) and Pink (2013), the term “ethnographic” is a relative one that can be used to describe any image or motion picture. To better comprehend communities and cultures, one can utilise one’s own photos, videos filmed in the home, films and documentaries, as well as images taken by ethnographers or others. Different viewpoints and angles can lead to different interpretations of the same

sight. They might concur, disagree, or be different from one another. What counts is how the image is interpreted and the setting in which it is placed. The evolution and modifications of anthropologists’ use of films and photographs in their ethnographic research will be covered in the parts that follow.

### DEVELOPMENT OF FILMS AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The use of images and moving pictures in anthropological research was not widely favoured by anthropologists. Photographs were included in the monographs of early field anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski but they were not analysed or discussed. Only verbal descriptions of cultures were allowed. Images were frequently overlooked or weren’t thought to be relevant.



Malinowski taking a photograph in the field

Only written ethnographies supported by in-depth field notes and were regarded as “genuine ethnography.” The movies were “viewed as little more than visual field notes, representations that were pleasing to the eye but little to promote ethnographic theory, a viewpoint that was virtually uncontested until early proponents like Margaret Mead and Jean Rouch argued for the value of ethnographic film in the 1950s (Griffiths, 2002, p. 168)”.

It’s interesting to note that mining engineer Robert Flaherty produced “Nanook of the North”, a film about the Inuit in the Hudson Bay (click on the link to see the film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IAcRjBq93Y>), in 1922, and “Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age”, a film about the Savaiim in Western Samoa, in 1926. An anthropologist named Margaret Mead was conducting fieldwork among the Samoans, less than 300 miles from where Moana was shot. Franz Boaz’s fieldwork location was not far from, where Nanook was also shot. Mead and Boaz did not place any significance

on the movies. Given that Mead produced ethnographic films and promoted the value of the visual medium (as mentioned in the next sections), this becomes more noteworthy (Heider, 2006).

### The Early Pioneers

Alfred Cort Haddon, Walter Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen were among the pioneers of photography and filmmaking. In 1898, Haddon was one of the first to record the Mer Islanders and Australian Aborigines for four minutes (see a brief excerpt of this movie here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoStmH3nS2o>). Following in 1901, Walter Baldwin Spencer documented the Arrernte rites in Central Australia on film. In addition to taking pictures of the Australian Aborigines, Frank Gillen was also very interested in gathering ethnographic data. Spencer and Gillen worked together to capture images and make films of the Australian Aborigines, while they were there. They collaborated to produce thirteen movies about the Arrernte festivities. Photographs were not utilised for

UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY THROUGH THE VISUAL / 3

ethnographic research but rather to scientifically categorise humans on a spectrum of evolution. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, visual approaches were unpopular due to their novelty and the high cost of the filmmaking equipment. Additionally, there was the question of how to deal with fieldwork-related equipment failure in remote locations.

The apparatus was cumbersome and challenging to manoeuvre. For instance, when shooting a dance, if the dancers went outside the camera's field of view, the camera was unable to capture the full range of movements. People frequently objected to being photographed because they believed it invaded their privacy. Thus, anthropologists frequently recorded and depicted situations that could be "manufactured", such as dancing ceremonies.

**Texts vs. Visuals**

The employment of the visual methods was too constrained by epistemological issues. Anthropologists believed that the socio-cultural complexity of social life could not be adequately captured by pictures. It was believed that complicated systems were best communicated through written words and that images were a poor substitute. Since viewers might interpret an image whatever they wanted, it was thought that movies and other visuals undermined the authority of anthropologists (Griffiths, 2002).

Given anthropology's positivist emphasis, the anthropologist's voice was regarded authoritative and knowledgeable. Positivist anthropologists loved photos because they could be edited, captioned and recaptioned. Photographs were deemed to be objective and realistic. Captions provided anthropological meanings to the audience, ensuring the anthropologist's authority.

Films were considered to only work with anthropology lectures. Margaret Mead's 'Trance and Dance in Bali' (1952) contained a substantial narration.

MacDougall (1997) contends that the shift in anthropological thought caused the fall in visual tools in ethnography. Now, genealogical and oral records are emphasised. Anthropologists favoured notebooks. The camera was no longer utilised in fieldwork and photos were limited to museums (Heider, 2006; Banks, 1997).

**Margaret Mead's Contribution**

The work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson among the Balinese after World War II indicated a change in this strategy. Mead held that the camera was unbiased in the positivist anthropological tradition of Herbert Spencer and Franz Boas. She asserted that the camera plays a similar role to the telescope in astronomy. She felt it was crucial to capture actual happenings with the camera (Mead, 1975).

Mead's methodological approach to filmmaking emphasised the ethnologist, filming team and informants. This nods to reflexivity and the informant's perspective. Mead said it was hard to resist filming from the filmmaker's perspective. She believed informants could help design and edit the film. In Bali, she taught Balinese as assistants and critics.

Films provided 'masses of objective material' that could be reanalysed in the light of theoretical modifications, according to Mead. She thought films were better than words for recording cultural change and dance and rituals. Lack of photography and filmmaking abilities shouldn't stop Mead. The ethnographer can direct a talented cameraman to make up for this.

Mead and Bateson's 1942 work on Bali, a watershed in visual anthropology, used images as a recording. Once set to record automatically, Mead assumed the camera was inconspicuous and unseen (Mead, 1995). Though Mead emphasised the need of involving informants, her work didn't reflect their viewpoint or understanding of their culture (Banks, 1997).



Margaret Mead doing her fieldwork

## SHIFTS IN THEORY AND FILMING METHODS

The camera's employment as a methodological instrument must be considered in the light of sociology and social anthropology theory. The transition in anthropological thought from evolutionary to positivist to reflexive analysis is represented in visual analysis. The neutral observer position of the researcher has been questioned. Research is based on the notion that field discoveries can't be predicted.

### We see what we desire to discover

Whose story is it? Whose version should prevail? Visual ethnography has shifted towards including informant voices. This relationship between filmmaker and informant informed visual ethnography. MacDougall (1991) and Pink (2013) questioned whether including the informant's voice is enough to portray natives' perspectives. This methodological dilemma has no one solution. Often, an ethnographer's language cannot convey local mental categories. Some films incorporate indigenous narration, such as Jean Rouch's *La Chasse au lion a l'arc* (1965) and Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds* (1963). (See for Rouch's film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PARjcJyZcKc> you might be interested in this short documentary on Jean Rouch as well: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jzAegaqqf4>)

### Different Ways of Incorporating the Voice of the Informant

The subject's point of view becomes crucial if a movie is intended to reflect the interaction between the filmmaker and the informant. The premise of an observational film is that the event being described must be shown exactly as it is.

Films that centre on a single individual are typically shot from that person's perspective.

- However, the presence of other individuals and the influence they have on the filmmaking process have an impact on the final output.
- It's possible that individuals are merely fascinated to the creation of movies. Some may consider themselves to be significant field informants, while others may merely be curious or volunteer. The director could either disregard them or include them. In any case, they have an impact on the movie's outcome.
- An essential informant may occasionally object to being filmed.
- In contrast, a person's charm could entirely eclipse the movie, as happened with Bob Dylan

in the 1966 movie "Don't Look Back" (MacDougall, 1991).

The film's final outcome isn't merely impacted by the filmmaker or person. A film can transcend such restrictions, since it has a social and cultural context. The film exceeds the filmmaker's and subject's boundaries (MacDougall, 1991). Spencer's film on Central Australia's Aranda isn't relevant to the issue. The source expected little from the film. Informants may also use films.

This is apparent in photo poses. The subjects sometimes direct the filmmaker. Sometimes films are only the subjects shooting rituals without knowing their meaning. MacDougall (1991) shows this by shooting Australian aboriginal rituals. The ceremonies may have a secret meaning for outsiders. The film's meaning differs every viewer:

- It might be the anthropologist accompanying the locals, according to anthropological theory.
- From a different angle, the anthropologist might be speaking in the natives' own words.
- It can possibly be the aboriginal people conversing with one another in the movie.
- It might be an indigenous person communicating to the anthropologist.
- Alternately, it might be a voice speaking to both the native and non-native people.

### The Factors Influencing the Shooting of a Film

Although, the making of a movie might be planned before conducting field research. It frequently depends on the social interactions and activities of the ethnographer.

The ties between the researcher and the informant frequently results in the development of visuals. Pink (2013) provides two examples from her personal fieldwork that contrast one another. The informants that she used to record and photograph the bull fights, really posed for pictures and asked for copies of the photos.

However, in West Africa, a photograph was valued at ten loaves of bread and was a status symbol. Thus, the images portrayed and implied that the researcher and those being investigated were in an unequal relationship and standing. As a result, there are no predetermined ways that the picture will be interpreted and observed. Both the professional and cultural vantage points are critical.

### SEEING THROUGH THE LENS OF IDENTITIES

Since reality is a matter of opinion, there are many possible interpretations of a single film. It is a