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**An Open Exploratory Spirit?**

**Ethnography at Cardiff 1974 - 2001**

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## Abstract

The strong tradition of ethnography at Cardiff, with its distinctive blend of symbolic interactionism and structuralism, and its empirical foci on occupational socialisation, education, health and sexualities, is chronicled.

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Preface and Disclaimer

The title of this paper is adapted from Faris's (1967) history of the Chicago School from 1920 - 1932. In his final chapter he stresses, repeatedly, the open-minded theoretical attitude that characterised Chicago sociology in those years. We know, of course, that Chicago Sociology was less open to women and the interface of sociology and welfare reform (Deegan 1988). Faris deploys a number of phrases to characterise the theoretical openness, which include:

‘vigorous penetration into new fields’

‘this deliberate and even determined avoidance of a constrictive school of thought’

‘a body of developing sociology incomparably broader in content’

‘openness to influences from other traditions’

as well as the phrase from which we have extracted our title:

‘The open exploratory spirit’ (Faris, 1967: 130)

In taking a title from Faris we are not, in any way, wishing to suggest that sociology at Cardiff can be compared with that at Chicago. If there is a Cardiff School of Ethnography, it would be hubris to compare it with Chicago: and indeed such a

comparison would rightly invite derision. However, if there is a Cardiff School, and perhaps this paper will lead its audience to conclude that there is, the spirit of openness eulogised by Faris, is one of our aims. Indeed the specific theoretical openness Faris is describing in those quotes - a mixture of American and European theories - is exactly the theoretical openness we have striven for in Cardiff.

## Introduction

This paper has four sections. The first chronicles the ethnographic work at Cardiff from 1974-2001, and outlines its theoretical and methodological agenda. The second plays with the theme of crossing boundaries in his exploration of Cardiff as frontier. The third develops the interface between hypermedia, analysis and novel forms of representation. The fourth is a view from a friendly outsider, R.G. Burgess. There are two appendices. In Appendix A we have provided a list of the PhD and MPhil theses central to 'The Cardiff School', and in Appendix B a select bibliography of publications from Cardiff.

## Brief History 1974 - 2001

A sociology department at Cardiff had existed since 1963; but the scholarly epoch under discussion in this paper begins with the appointment of Paul Atkinson in 1974. He joined Anne Murcott, specifically to teach sociology to medical students. Sara Delamont joined them in 1976, and this created a critical mass of ethnographic expertise. All three had first degrees in Social Anthropology. In the UK in the 1960s this was the only social science in which participant observation was a taken for

granted data collection method. Anne Murcott had then moved into sociology via a classic community study of Banbury, (Stacey *et al.*, 1975) and was, in the early 1970s, focusing mainly on medical sociology (Murcott 1977; 1980) with a side interest in adult literacy students and their voluntary tutors. Later in the 1970s she embarked on what became her major empirical project: establishing/creating the sociology of food and eating. (Murcott 1983, 1998). This intellectual career shows three key empirical areas: two classic ones 'community' and 'health and illness', with a new one 'food and eating'.

Paul Atkinson and Sara Delamont had read Social Anthropology together at Cambridge when Edmund Leach and Stanley Tambiah were advocating the intellectual power of French structuralism. They moved, for their doctorates, to Edinburgh to an innovatory research department where participant observation was an acceptable method for doing education research (Hudson, 1977; Atkinson, 1984; Delamont, 1984). Paul had conducted the (single-handed) UK equivalent of Boys in White, while Sara had focused on an elite girls' school. Both had blended Symbolic Interactionist perspectives with ideas adapted from major European schools of thought, especially French structuralism. (See Atkinson, Reid and Sheldrake, 1977; Delamont, 1976).

Paul Atkinson has since worked on five areas: the sociology of health and illness, the frontiers between medical sociology and the sociology of scientific knowledge, sociology of (higher) education, sociological perspectives on language and discourse and the advancement of qualitative methods (Atkinson, 1981 and 1995, Delamont and Atkinson, 1995, Atkinson 1985, Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 1995). Sara



Delamont has worked predominantly on education (Delamont and Galton, 1986) and on gender (Delamont, 1989).

Once together in Cardiff the trio began to recruit doctoral students, to teach qualitative methods explicitly, and to broaden the range of empirical areas for investigation.

While a wide variety of topics related to aspects of health, education and occupational cultures and socialism predominated, there were also investigations of gay and lesbian identity, of leisure participation, and advances in methods. (See Appendix A)

Amanda Coffey joined Cardiff in 1990, as Anne Murcott's time here was drawing to a close. Her research has been on teacher education, on the socialisation of accountants, on young people and citizenship, and on hypermedia (Coffey and Delamont, 2000; Coffey 1993, Hall *et al.*, 1999 and Coffey 1999). Much of the research produced by Coffey, Murcott, Atkinson and Delamont themselves, and generated by the doctoral students trained in Cardiff, has been published in the Cardiff Papers in Qualitative Sociology series of volumes edited by Atkinson, Delamont and Coffey, which has now reached Volume 25. The perspective has been embodied in Atkinson *et al.* (2001) The Handbook of Ethnography and the journal Qualitative Research launched in 2001. In the rest of the paper, the intellectual bases and insights of this work are explored.

### The Theoretical & Methodological Agenda

In so far as there is a Cardiff School of Ethnography it can be said to have the following characteristics, which are all set out and then discussed in turn.

1. An absolute commitment to gathering data of the highest quality in a reflexive and rigorous manner following the principles of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, 1995).
2. A certainty that unless research is fun: exhilarating, exciting and with a bigger kick than champagne: it is not worth doing.
3. A faith in theorising from the 'bottom up': starting from the data. In this we pay homage to the spirit of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) strategies for developing grounded theory through theoretical sampling.
4. An enthusiasm for mixing classic American Symbolic Interactionism with French structuralist (and post-structuralist) perspectives especially those of Levi-Strauss and Bourdieu.
5. A preoccupation with exploring how the sociology of knowledge can be deployed in ethnographic work on occupational settings and cultures.
6. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, an open, exploratory spirit. We have tried to infuse ethnography at Cardiff with ideas from new theoretical movements, with techniques of data collection and analysis using new technologies, and to encourage new recruits to set their own theoretical and methodological priorities.

Data Collection and Analysis : in Cardiff we have tried, for over twenty years, to teach qualitative methods of data collection and analysis while we developed and wrote about them, as well as doing research ourselves. Our central concern has been to dispel the old fashioned idea that qualitative methods cannot be taught, an erroneous notion still widespread in the UK. When interviewing British Social Anthropologists

and Human Geographers in the early 1990s we found that they believed that while survey methods can be taught, ethnographic ones can only be learnt by doing fieldwork (see Parry, Atkinson and Delamont 1994, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry, 2000). We are totally opposed to that view, which is elitist in its consequences because it invokes an innate quality rather than a masterable skill. As part of our commitment to making ethnographic methods explicit and democratically available we have produced methods books (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 1995: Delamont, 1992a, 2002; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Coffey 1999). Alongside the production of books on how research should be done is the work on the development of analysis and text production (Atkinson, 1990, 1992; Coffey and Atkinson, 2001; Weaver and Atkinson, 1994).

Fun: we have tried to enthuse all those who work with us, so that they enjoy all the stages of research, including writing up their data into well-crafted accounts. Here our hope has been to produce active researchers who enjoy being social scientists.

Grounded Theory: the controversy surrounding this area since the outburst by Glaser (1992) is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we have always researchers to gather rich data and build up to their theoretical position from those data: believing that this is the spirit of the original proposals by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and is the strategy most likely to produce ethnographies which capture the world view and social behaviour of respondents and to generate worthwhile sociology.

The SI/Structuralism Mix: There are two related types of structuralism/post-structuralism which have been blended with SI in Cardiff ethnography. One type

derives from Levi-Strauss (and therefore has its roots in Durkheim) and is clearly anthropological. The other is the more obviously post-structuralist sociology of Bourdieu. The structuralism of Levi-Strauss, brought to British Social Anthropology by Edmund Leach. Stanley Tambiah and Mary Douglas, is rarely found in British sociology except in Cardiff. The mix of this version of structuralism which SI ethnography has been used by Parry (1987) in a study of body management among naturists; by George (1995) in research on menstruation, and in Delamont's (1992b) re-working of Mary Jo Deegan's (1988) historical analysis of the women of the Chicago School. The sociological structuralism or post-structuralism of Bourdieu is more commonly found in Britain, and has been used more frequently in Cardiff. In particular it has been central to our theoretical and empirical analyses of occupations and professions (Atkinson and Delamont, 1985, 1990, Delamont, Atkinson and Parry 2000). these analyses are closely related to the fifth characteristic of Cardiff's programme.

Exploring the Sociology of Knowledge: Atkinson (1983) argued that the long standing tradition of SI research on work and occupations, including that on occupational socialisation, had neglected to treat their knowledge base as sociologically problematic. This sociological task, which has been central to the strong programme of the sociology of science (Zuckerman, 1988) or Sociology of Scientific Knowledge (SSK) has been attempted in all our ethnographic investigations of occupations. Atkinson's (1995) ethnography of Haematology clinicians and laboratory scientists blends SI ethnography with the strong SSK programme.

The Open Exploratory Spirit: This is best demonstrated by the second and third parts of paper. Central to this exploratory spirit is a rejection of what Delamont and Atkinson (1995) have called 'the paradigm mentality'. Several of the ways in which the Cardiff ethnographers have explored new theories have already been mentioned. Several of the techniques of data analysis, and new forms of representation are covered in the paper by Coffey in Section 3. In section 2 Paul Atkinson deals with Cardiff as Frontier.

## Part 2

### Cardiff As Frontier

My title, of course, is meant to be allusive and ironic. There have been many 'frontiers' in the history of Sociology - most notably the identification of the zone of transition and processes of acculturation and disorganisation in Chicago in the early decades of this century; 'night as frontier' in Murray Melbin's (1987) memorable formulation.

Strictly speaking, Cardiff has never featured in quite that guise. It could have done. As a city, Cardiff could well have presented the sociological community with social processes analogous to the social and intellectual conditions of Chicago, over much the same period. Like Chicago, Cardiff was a place of little importance prior to the emergence of the region in the industrial revolution; and its significance rested in its proximity to major centres of production and its strategic location in terms of transportation. Cardiff was primarily a docks town, with one of the busiest commercial docks areas in the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Its populations expanded considerably over the period. Physically - and without the benefit of the great fire of Chicago - Cardiff is a product of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. While never a great melting pot quite like the great metropolitan centres of the United States, Cardiff's population was diverse. Like most dockland cities, it had significant populations of immigrants. Cardiff had, for instance, significant populations of Chinese, Somali, Greek and Italian settlers. Indeed, Cardiff has a reputation (reasonably well deserved) for having had a settled, ethnically diverse population for generations, and good relations between them. The reputation has been gained partly by virtue of a collective amnesia concerning racially-based disorder at various key points in the twentieth century.

Also, like many dockland areas in North America, the UK and elsewhere, the Cardiff docks suffered a protracted period of decline and decay. In recent years - again, like many cities with similar histories - Cardiff has experienced a regeneration of its docks. Baltimore provides a repeated point of reference. In a classic transition from an industrial modernity to a late-modern or postmodern condition - from the sphere of production and distribution to the sphere of leisure and consumption. The docks are now characterised by museums and displays (e.g. Techniquest and a Roald Dahl centre) restaurants, and the highly contentious site of the proposed new Opera House. I shall return to the postmodern moment a little later.

Like Chicago, Cardiff had an early University Settlement. It can reasonably argue that Social Work has been a feature of the University's work virtually since its foundation over a century ago. Unlike Chicago's Hull House, however, it did not take off as part of a tradition of systematic social inquiry. Ironically, however, Cardiff did feature in

the early twentieth century *American* Sociological canon. The theme of ethnicity linked the two. St. Clair Drake, one of the doyens of American sociology of race, used Cardiff as a research site. It is, in passing, notable that nobody actually pays any attention to that particular episode in sociological history. It is intriguing from my point of view to speculate that had that research taken place against today's academic culture, the opportunity would have been seized to establish formal partnerships and co-funding between the Universities of Chicago and Cardiff. The theme of race in Cardiff was later to form the topic of subsequent sociological-cum-anthropological research in the UK. Most notably, Little's (1947) studies of race relations took Cardiff and its docklands as a key research site.

To some extent, then, Cardiff was more of a research site than a research centre for many years. While it could - as I have suggested - developed an indigenous research tradition on social change, ethnicity, community and the like, it never happened. Despite the notoriety of areas of Cardiff known proverbially for their local colour (such as the so-called Tiger Bay docks area), there never grew up a distinctively Cardiff urban sociology. By contrast, insofar as Wales produced an indigenous tradition of its own, it was its post-war series of community studies, inspired by Alwyn Rees (1950) and his circle in Aberystwyth.

Cardiff was and is, in a small way, placed at various social and intellectual frontiers and transitions. Turning its back on preoccupations with the *Gemeinschaft* of Welsh rural and community studies (that were characteristic of other sites, notably Swansea) (See Harris 1990) the city and its milieu prompted sustained attention to the modern division of labour, with a focus on intellectual and professional elites, their

reproduction and everyday work. Neither distinctively Welsh nor English in social composition or culture, Cardiff turned outward, to American and European sociological inquiry. Its development and its intellectual flavour has also reflected the transition from a 'classic' ethnography towards a more problematic, 'postmodern' perhaps, set of perspectives on the contexts and conduct of ethnographic research.

If the 'first' Chicago School passed by Cardiff - despite their obvious parallels and occasional points of contact - the Second Chicago School had much greater direct impact. The development of ethnographic research, and the integration of interactionist perspectives, which emerged at Cardiff in the 1970s, reflected a much more direct and conscious development of American interactionism and the inspiration of authors such as Everett Hughes and Anselm Strauss. The intellectual affinities were, perhaps, less with Chicago itself as with the California versions of Chicago, in San Francisco, Davis and elsewhere.

Rather than a pure copying of American interactionist sociology, Cardiff's own 'little tradition' of qualitative research was grounded in, and developed out of, a mix of intellectual traditions. Indeed, it is arguable that insofar as the Cardiff School (if there is one) has any interest beyond the purely parochial, then it lies in the fact that Cardiff is both frontier and microcosm. It is a frontier between various intellectual strands - American, British and European - and a microcosm of how ethnographic methods, interactionist sociology and other intellectual current have intersected. Cardiff too is microcosmic of how those intersections have themselves changed, how boundaries have shifted, and how the overall intellectual project has changed.



These inspirations outlined in Section 1 continued to provide a bedrock of inspiration for the subsequent ethnographic work. They were never adopted in a pure form, however. From the outset, there was a sense of dissatisfaction. Many of the research sites we chose were concerned with the production and reproduction of specialist knowledge: medicine, psychiatry, pharmacy, genetic science, social work, accounting, journalism. The interactionist tradition was found to be incomplete for those purposes. The recurrent preoccupation with institutional processes left little space for the principled exploration of knowledge itself. The eclectic approach to ethnographic work was thus imbued with various approaches to expert and everyday knowledge - structuralist, phenomenological, ethnomethodological.

What is noticeable, then, is that - quite typically for the British context - Cardiff's was an 'impure' development of the interactionist approach. It was also a highly pragmatic one, with relatively little concern for the history ideas, such as successive re-evaluations of interactionism's intellectual roots. It is, I think, characteristic of a good deal of British intellectual life that schools of thought which elsewhere exist in tightly bounded forms and in mutual isolation can flourish in hybrid versions and in close proximity within the same institutional setting. The eclecticism of much of Cardiff's work, and its mingling of different intellectual traditions, has been a strength, and is itself a microcosm of much British social science.

Indeed, one can follow the terminology suggested by Basil Bernstein (e.g. 1971: see Atkinson 1985). Socially, the British higher education system has been characterised by strongly *classified* segments. That is, the academy has strong symbolic boundaries, insulating it from the external social environment. The British university has

traditionally been socially exclusionary, basing its social fabric on the ideal of sponsored social mobility. It has fostered strong pressures towards academic specialisation and subject loyalty. On the other hand, within those strong boundaries, competing paradigms (to use that word for just a minute) may be allowed to co-exist. Further more, in some contexts, the boundaries between would-be paradigms are allowed to weaken, and various hybridisation's and compromises allowed to emerge. This is hardly attributable to a national characteristic, although several decades ago Perry Anderson (1969) suggested some such characteristic as a trait in British intellectual life. (This terminology is inexact: it is part and parcel of this academic heritage that we are suspicious of the very idea of the intellectual.) Anderson suggested that for a variety of historical factors - not least the influence of refugees from utilitarian European regimes of both the right and left - British academics were typically suspicious of grand theoretical schemes and their totalism influence. A sceptical attitude and a firm commitment to empirical investigation seemed the order of the day.

It is a characteristic consequence of such a general academic style that exotic, foreign ideas can be accommodated through a process of 'domestication'. This is true, for instance, of much European social thought. French structuralism thought was, in British circles, rendered accessible and *usable* through empirically grounded work. In anthropology, for instance, people like Edmund Leach and Mary Douglas used the ideas of Claude Levi-Strauss without ever being completely seduced by his grand vision and his most general theoretical propositions. The same is true in literary criticism, where authors such as David Lodge (1981) took key ideas from the Parisian

structuralists and adapted them into more pragmatic and empirical approaches to literary criticism.

I do not mean to imply that all of British intellectual life has been characterised by such perspectives, but it is, I think, a recognisable trait across many disciplines.

While we tend to be socially exclusive, and operate with strong disciplinary boundaries, those disciplines themselves have often been allowed to be fairly eclectic. This may reflect a number of institutional factors. On the one hand, notwithstanding the particular status of Oxford and Cambridge, the UK scene is much more multi-centred than, say, France. While it may seem that British academics have all been to a small number of schools and universities, in comparison with Paris we are probably much more diverse. We do not have generations of intellectuals in the same tradition as the Normaliens. In comparison with the United States, on the other hand, we are so much smaller. Academic departments and research groups can develop, it is true, but they can rarely afford to do so in perfect isolation from other influences: many of us have to be generalists rather than narrow purists.

It is, I think, for such reasons that we have had remarkably few purist groups. The general intellectual style has been more eclectic on the whole. We have not had, for example, people working within an exclusively interactionist tradition. (And why, incidentally, early attempts to establish branches of SSSI attracted so little support.) Likewise, the approach to ethnographic research has been pragmatic and eclectic too. It is for the same reasons, one suspects, that the Cardiff experience was not atypical. The approach to studying education, medicine, organisations and professions was always coloured by a liberal admixture of structuralist and poststructuralist

perspectives on the construction and reproduction of knowledge. Likewise, the boundaries within and between interpretative sociologies in general were seen as permeable. Ethnomethodology was welcomed with some scepticism, and deployed as appropriate in the context of broader ethnographic work. These interests were added to the anthropological perspectives that informed the early years, drawing on Levi-Strauss and Barthes, rather than the subsequent fashion for Foucauldian discourse analysis. In a similar vein, the influence of European sociology was a significant element. The phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Schutz were early influences.

In terms of the development of ethnographic work, the result was also eclectic. As I have said, the immediate inspiration came from anthropology rather than interactionist sociology. The latter was, if anything, filled in retrospectively. It is noticeable that for the participants, the continuation of the Edinburgh work again at Cardiff represented no conscious rebellion against other sociologies. None of the protagonists had formal qualifications in sociology, and there was nothing to rebel against in that sense. Indeed, it was a continuation of taken-for-granted ideas rather than a conscious formulation of any particular programme.

It is instructive to compare the methodological map of twenty years or so ago with the present scene. Anthropologists of the time took for granted the essential nature of ethnography. That was so in two related senses. First, its epistemological status was assured: whatever theoretical disputes might erupt in anthropology - as they did, often quite floridly - the bedrock of ethnography was treated as a secure foundation. Second, the majority of anthropologists took it for granted by never teaching ethnographic methods at all systematically. It was an oral tradition (if anything).

In the absence of formal training, and with a sparse methodological literature, coupled with a lack of experienced methods, the generation of researchers that included Delamont, Atkinson and Murcott had to fend for themselves. They were largely self-taught. The second Chicago School provided research exemplars, and some elements of guidance, but there was no direct contact, and the culture was partially reproduced at a distance, at one or two removes.

For the local culture, the publication of Hammersley and Atkinson's Ethnography: Principles in Practice, in 1983, marked a turning point. While one cannot claim that it was the major determinant, it also coincided with something of a change in the academic culture: interestingly it coincided almost exactly with Burgess's (1984) In the Field. And since that period, Cardiff has again been something of a microcosm of much wider - even global - changes. From being an avowedly minority commitment in sociology, ethnographic research methods (and qualitative methods more generally) have become widespread, fashionable, and institutionalised. I do not know how one would now begin to cope with the methodological literature if one were starting from scratch. The days of the purely oral tradition have gone, for good or ill; the autodidact may still exist, but is a throwback.

Cardiff has, of course, been subject to the same market forces as any other centre in the UK beyond. We have all moved from an implicit model of academic socialisation to an explicit one. Twenty years and more ago, the key attributes of the ethnographer were primarily personal, and based on personal mentoring. Now we expect explicit training, and are more likely to think in terms of skills rather than personal qualities.

The transition reflects and contributes to a major shift within the academy. The insertion of terms such as 'training skills' is more than stylistic. To take Basil Bernstein's (1971) useful ideas once more, there has been a major cultural shift towards 'visible pedagogy' in the universities, and an increasingly tight 'framing' of knowledge acquisition. Competencies are increasingly subject to definition, ever more finely sifted, taught and assessed. The units of knowledge acquisition, such as credits and specific competencies are equally finely graded, and subject to rational-calculative accounting mechanisms.

Cardiff's engagement with ethnographic methods again has reflected and promoted such tendencies. After Surrey, Cardiff was early in the market with a Masters course in Research Methods, in which ethnographic work featured prominently. Through that course, and the methodological work that came out of Cardiff throughout the 1980s and 1990s, it has been a major site of knowledge reproduction in ethnography. In that respect, Cardiff has helped to promote a version of ethnography that has converged with versions promoted elsewhere, to become a kind of orthodoxy. There is a strong, emergent paradigm of ethnographic research, widely transmitted and reproduced through publications and training courses. It is often a second-hand version of methodology, produced and reproduced through secondary sites of re-contextualization. The classification and framing of such knowledge is often very strong, as semi-scholars as van Gennep (1967) called them seek to classify and codify research methods, paradigms and so on - usually far beyond the bounds of common sense.

Cardiff ethnographers must plead guilty to helping to promote this emergent orthodoxy. Through our training and supervision, through our methodological and empirical publications, we have helped to sustain the success of a version of ethnographic research that has become diffused through a wide range of sites and disciplines. We have not done so single-handed. On the contrary, there have been increasingly large numbers of academics involved in the process.

There are countervailing tendencies. There are various heterodoxies to which we have contributed as well. We have - not always intentionally - contributed towards the intellectual crisis of ethnography and ethnographic representation. We have continued the tradition of eclecticism by drawing on literary and cultural theory in analysing ethnographic texts and the textual reconstruction of social realities. We have tried to explore some of the centrifugal forces and have led us and others away from a simple endorsement of the emergent orthodoxy of ethnography. Indeed we could be accused of double standards. We are not alone in this either. We contribute to and benefit from the standardisation and codification of ethnographic methods. We do so while simultaneously appearing to render them problematic, and undermine their foundations.

This reflects, perhaps, what Thomas Kuhn (1962) once called the 'essential tension' between the stable, conventional pursuit of research, and the instability of innovation and experiment. It is also worth adding that we ourselves do not see quite such a radical disjuncture as do others. We do not, for instance, see the critical examination of ethnographic representation as a radical departure from earlier, more classic approaches. We see them, rather, as logical extensions from the preoccupations of

anthropology and symbolic interactionism with forms of language and representation. It is a logical development of the principle of *reflexivity* rather than a completely novel version of it.

Cardiff is no different from any other centre. We have simultaneously reflected and projected changes in the wider academic community. Insofar as we have made a contribution, we can be pleased with the ways in which our ideas have been disseminated and our publications distributed. Equally, we must share in some of the potential blame than may accrue. There has been, I feel, an undue emphasis on *method* among younger scholars and recent converts. One might almost suggest that method has become fetichised. Method dominates. Method is, of course, global, and publishers and pedagogues want skills that can be translated freely on an international scale. Method has become transformed into commodity knowledge. Even while commentators like Lincoln and Denzin (1994, 2000) write of the seventh moment in the development of qualitative work, there are many teachers and practitioners celebrating the boundaries of crudely conceptualised paradigms, and patrolling the borders of orthodox practice. In erecting their perimeter fences, they even subordinate sociological or anthropological theory to methodology.

Insofar we have, in however modest a way, contributed to that development, then we feel ambivalent. Ethnographic research is treated with a seriousness it was not always accorded twenty years ago. But popularity and respectability come at a price. The frontiers we now survey are complex. The terrain of ethnography has become fractured, and Cardiff continues to stand at the intersection between some of them: the contrasts between traditional empirical work on the one hand, and postmodern,



feminist perspectives on the other; the intersection between methodological orthodoxy and the carnivalesque proliferation of methods and representations; the relationships between ethnography and literary and cultural studies. These are not issues for simple resolution, but for creative exploration. We attempt to do so, increasingly constrained by the exigencies of resourcing and institutional pressures for short-term gain.

### Part 3

#### Innovations and explorations: analysing and representing ethnography.

##### Introduction

This section reviews some of the recent developments and debates concerning the analysis of qualitative data and the ethnographic representation of social realities. The postmodern turn in ethnography, and in the social sciences more generally, has inspired many commentators to identify and to explore a varied range of ways to report and represent the social or the cultural. In recent years there has emerged a process of destabilisation: taken-for-granted methods of representing the outcomes of social research. An outcome of this is a celebration of diversity of representational modes. We do not believe that it is necessary to endorse the rhetoric and the most extreme formulations of postmodern inquiry in order to take seriously the issues we have been grappling with and discuss briefly here. Indeed, we believe that although the postmodernist turn has often provided the inspiration, earlier - more classical - versions of sociological or anthropological understanding furnish justifications for the

exploration of ethnographic representation. We contrast this centrifugal movement with a current centripetal tendency amongst qualitative researchers to converge on a particular type of data management and analysis. This model combines methodological perspectives associated with grounded theory and the techniques of computing. We note that the use of microcomputing strategies for qualitative data analysis is becoming widespread and this includes almost a globalizing process within the research community. Towards the end of the paper we identify a strategy which synthesises the themes we have outlined.

### Contestation and representation

Contemporary debates over the ethnographic representation of cultural phenomena have concentrated on the textual construction of reality (Atkinson 1990, 1996). Emerging most starkly within the discipline of anthropology, such debates have now spread to sociology and the ethnographic endeavour more generally. At the centre of such debates is the critical appraisal of ethnographic writing and the social production of the ethnographic text. Traditionally, the professional and academic status passage has been completed and confirmed by the construction of a major text. The anthropological monograph, therefore, was the culmination of the ethnography and the legitimating mark of the anthropologist. The relationships between fieldwork, text production and the discipline of anthropology, have then developed over time. The anthropologist was identified with his or her people, who in turn were identified with and in the ethnography. The ethnographic monograph thus became the embodiment of the discipline itself and the identify of its practitioners. Within the classical period of British and American anthropology the ethnographic monograph enshrined a series

of standardised representations of societies and (by implication) of their authors (Boon 1982)<sup>1</sup> .

Given the importance of the ethnography as textual product it is a little wonder that radical assaults on its status should strike at the roots of the discipline. Thus in recent years, anthropology - once so stable - has experienced a 'crisis of representation'. The textual foundations have been shaken and, along with them, the intellectual faith that has informed their production and reception. The status of ethnographic texts has also come under scrutiny from within sociology (Atkinson 1990, 1992, Hammersley 1992). In many ways this has proved a less critical issue for sociology than for anthropology, not least because ethnographic methods and monographs are much less central to sociology as a whole. Important though qualitative research is in many fields of empirical sociology, it does not underpin the entire academic enterprise as it does for anthropology. the critiques of ethnography in sociology have sometimes followed directions similar to those in anthropology, (see Hastrup 1992, Richardson 1994). Several of the positions which have contributed to such critiques have been associated with the general thrust of postmodernism. Postmodernism in general has certainly contributed to reappraisals of cultural representation, in the human sciences and beyond. It should also be acknowledged that recent developments are not dependent on postmodernism per se. Many of the current tendencies can be understood as developments of anthropology and sociological perspectives, rather than radical departures from them.

It is possible to identify a number of contributions to the contestation of ethnographic representation, and a number of trends which have emerged out of such claims.

Contributions have come from a range of intellectual directions. The weakening of cultural (and indeed) disciplinary boundaries has been spurred by a movement which we might usefully call the 'rediscovery of rhetoric'. Rhetoric is no longer consigned to the margins of legitimate scholarship. It has more recently been recognised as central to scholarly work and production. The classical theory and practice of rhetoric was concerned with argumentation and persuasion. The separation of rhetoric and science at the Enlightenment implied a radical distinction between two contrasted sets of commitments. On the other side are ranged rhetoric, persuasion, opinion and ornamentation. The aspirations of modern scholarship were firmly rooted in such dualities. The separation of rhetoric from logic in the creation of modern disciplinary knowledge parallels a number of other, equally fundamental, separations and dichotomies. It established the possibility of an observer armed with a neutral language of observation (since untouched with rhetoric) and thus allowed for the elementary distinction between that observer and the observed. The rediscovery of rhetoric creates the possibility of removing such distinctions: of removing the distance between the subjects and objects of inquiry, and questioning the taken-for-granted canons of science and reason. It reminds us that scientific accounts and texts have rhetorical qualities. It challenges cherished distinctions between scientific fact and textual production, or between the reality of the natural-scientific world and narrative accounts of the social world. (For other accounts of representation of the natural and social, see: Lutz and Collins 1993; Bazerman 1988; Myers 1990; Latour and Woolgar 1979).

The work of authors such as Edward Said (1978) has placed this weakening of cultural boundaries more overtly within an ideological perspective. Said's sustained

commentary of the *orientalism* of western observation has served to strengthen the case that traditional ethnographic texts have a privileging effect. That is, the cultures which have been represented have been reduced to the subjugated and muted objects of a dominating discourse. In enumerating and classifying the exotic characteristics of the oriental, then, the privileged observer has established a position of authority, which is inscribed in the texts of exploration, description and classification (Marcus 1992). A virtually identical set of issues can be described for the encounters of the old world with the new in the conquest and appropriation of the Americas. From the earliest accounts of the Spanish conquests through to the accounts of nineteenth-century explorers and ethnologists, the continent has been populated by others and appropriated through the accompanying representations. The texts of exploration and exploitation repeatedly inscribe the metropolitan perspective and the alterity (otherness) of the new world (Pratt 1992; Todorov 1984).

Feminist theory and praxis has also questioned the thus far privileged position of observer-author. Here the argument has not been about the over-or-under representation of men and women as ethnographic authors, but rather about the relationships between feminism, gender and ethnography at more fundamental levels. Clough (1992), for instance, articulates a feminist view, drawing on psychoanalytic perspectives. She argues that from a feminist standpoint one can see the standard realist accounts of ethnography as incorporating unconscious fantasies and desire concerning race, gender or class. Realism, she argues, suppresses those unconscious processes under the guise of factual discourse Wolf (1992) also addresses the feminist perspective on ethnography and representation. She suggests that reflexive, self-critical attitudes are particularly characteristic of feminist thought. Feminism in

general encourages an examination of power and powerlessness, the mutual obligations of researcher and researched. She implies that feminist scholars were exploring these issues independently of their becoming fashionable topics among male anthropologists. As Wolf also suggests, the heightened sensibilities of feminist scholars have led directly towards problems of representation. In a similar vein Mascia-Lees et al. (1989) draw attention to a concern among feminist anthropologists for modes of understanding (including writing) that do not reduce women to the position of voiceless *objects*, but treat them as subjects in their own right, entitled to their own voices. This echoes the very foundations of the feminist research process - the concern with voice and authority, accounts and experience (Smith 1987, Olesen 1994).

The proper representation of social reality has therefore become contested (for a more detailed discussion see Atkinson and Coffey 1995). A major consequence of this has been critical attention on the production (and reading) of ethnographic texts. The historical and stylistic continuities with so-called realist fiction have been well documented (Krieger 1983, 1984, Atkinson 1992, Cappetti 1993). Literary realism has been identified as the dominant mode of representation, implying an impersonal, all-but invisible-narrator (Van Maanen 1988). As a style, as a collection of literary devices, realist writing is a massively familiar one for the construction of factual authoritative accounts. There is, therefore, the danger of taking it for granted, and hence of treating it as a natural way of representing the social. Despite this tendency towards a realist approach, it remains by no means clear that literary realism is the only - or even the best - way to produce accounts of varied social worlds. Indeed, as Atkinson (1983) noted, there is something of a paradox in the use of what one might

call a 'straightforward' realism for ethnographic purposes. There is a tension between the conventions of realism and the assumption of most ethnographic work. For most ethnographers - whether sociology or anthropology be their primary discipline - recognise the complexity of social life and its collective representations. Equally, they recognise the fundamentally constitutive nature of language. That is, language use creates and constructs social reality. Interpretive anthropologists, for instance, are committed to the ideals of 'thick description', while symbolic interactionists equally endorse an interpretative sociology that places language at the heart of an essentially constructivist view of reality and representation. And yet conventional realism is founded on a very different treatment of language. Such realism has historically encouraged little or no explicit concern for the language of representation itself. Realism treats language as a taken-for-granted resource. The realism of conventional writing may therefore result in 'thin' description. Such arguments - that narratives and descriptions from a single, implicit point of view may not do justice to the complexity of cultural forms - have given rise to various alternative approaches. These epitomise the diversity of more recent ethnographic work and reflect the interpretative turn in ethnographic writing and representation.

Various commentators have called for texts that are more open, messy and fragmented in order to do at least two things: firstly to challenge and highlight the very conventionality of such ethnographic writing and secondly to allow for more creative and complex modes of representation (cf Mulkay 1985). Further, therefore, while the conventionality of all modes of representation is recognised, there is more than a hint in such arguments that complex texts may be more faithful to the complexities and contours of social life. We have discussed some of these alternative forms of

representation elsewhere (Atkinson and Coffey 1995, Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

The sorts of alternative representational modes we have in mind include: a dialogic approach, (Dwyer 1977, 1979, Allan 1994, Holquist 1990); ethno-drama or ethno-theatre (Paget 1990, Ellis and Bochner 1992); and poetry (Richardson 1992). These approaches are in turn closely related to the promotion of biographical and autobiographical work in anthropology and sociology: in particular, on the 'writing' of lives and selves (Stanley 1992; Hastrup 1992).

The general affinities between experimental ethnographic writing and postmodernism are clear. Postmodernism, in recognising and celebrating the diversity of types and representations, encourages a variety of genres. It also encourages the blurring and mixing of genres. It questions the monovocal expression of authenticity in favour of polyvocal texts and the celebration of diversity. There is, therefore, much in the postmodernist movement to commend various radical re-evaluations of ethnographic writing. It is equally arguable that the possibilities for textual experimentation are contained within the modernist movement in literature. Modern literature provides us with a multiplicity of textual formats and devices for the construction of written representations. Modernist fiction found many ways, for instance, of representing the mingling of external events and inner dialogue; of reconstructing the minutiae of extraordinarily detailed description; of linking factual reportage with the fantastic. By adopting some of these 'new' conventions and by experimenting in similar ways ethnographic texts can also be viewed as undergoing a modernist movement.

Ethnographic data analysis and the computing moment



It is possible to identify a different trend in the treatment of ethnographic data. This is a trend toward a sort of homogeneity in (particularly) the analysis of data. We believe that an emerging orthodoxy is being adopted globally by key members of the qualitative research community. This is largely, though by no means exclusively, linked to the growth of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) as a subfield of expertise (Lee and Fielding, 1991; Fielding 2001). Software packages aimed at analysing qualitative data are now widespread and it is a fast growing field. We do not intend to review that literature, or the existing software here. That has been done elsewhere and is an area to which Cardiff has contributed (Burgess 1995, Tesch 1990, Weaver and Atkinson 1994, Weitzman and Miles 1994). It is, however, important that we draw attention to the area in general, and some specific issues within it.

We note, in particular, the convergence of most computer applications on a general model of data marking and retrieval. Many of the software packages may most accurately be described as computer-based applications for the storage and retrieval of data. While there are additional facilities and sophistication involved, the general notion of coding remains fundamental to such CAQDAS. The purpose of such software is, at root, twofold. First, it facilitates the attachment of codes to segments of data. Second, it allows the researcher to retrieve all instances in the data that share a code. Such code-and-retrieve approaches are exemplified in programs such as *The Ethnograph*, one of the most widely disseminated and used of all the applications. The underlying logic of coding and searching for coded segments differs little, if at all, from that of manual techniques. There is no great conceptual advance over the indexing of typed or even manuscript notes and transcripts, or of marking them

physically with code-words, coloured inks and the like. In practice the computer can add many advantages. The speed and comprehensiveness of searches is an undoubted benefit: the computer does not search the data file until it comes up with the first example that will 'do' to illustrate an argument, nor will stop after it has found just one or a couple of apposite quotes or vignettes. The software has an additional merit that definitely marks an advance on the practical value of manual coding and searching. It can cope with multiple and overlapping codes; it can conduct multiple searches, using more than one codeword simultaneously. Software like The Ethnograph allows the analyst to combine codewords, in an approximation of Boolean logic, to facilitate complex searches. The co-occurrence of codings can be an important issue; finding them can be a useful tool. Since the software can handle very large numbers of codings and separate codewords, in purely mechanical terms the computer can help with more comprehensive and more complex code-and-retrieve tasks than can be achieved by manual techniques.

Many of the software packages allow the researcher to do more than just coding. Software such as The Ethnograph (version 4.0 and later), Kwalitan and NUD&IST, all permit the user to do things like attaching analytic or other memoranda to specific points in the text. The aim is to incorporate many of the key tasks of 'grounded theory' strategies within the software applications. A useful discussion of the convergence of (versions of) 'grounded theory' and CAQDAS has been outlined by Lonkila (1995).

We would certainly not wish to deny the relevance of 'grounded theory', nor the potential value of coding qualitative data (nor the value of CAQDAS for such work).

A danger that we have indicated (Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson 1996) is the unnecessarily close equation of grounded theory, coding, and software. Grounded theorising is more than coding, and software can be used to do more than code-and-retrieve textual data. The point here is not about the full potential of CAQDAS, nor about the true nature of grounded theorising. Rather, the danger we identify lies in the glib association between the two, linked by an emphasis on data coding procedures.

In our view, the association of CAQDAS with a simplified 'grounded theory' justification can be misleading to students and researchers to whom it is introduced. CAQDAS offers a variety of useful ways of organising data in order to search them, but coding data for use with computer programs is *not analysis*. It is important to avoid the misapprehension that coding and computing lend a scientific gloss to qualitative research. The growing 'respectability' of qualitative methods, together with an adherence to canons of rigour associated primarily with other research traditions, can lead to the imposition of spurious standards (Fielding and Lee 1995; Fielding 2001). The categorisation of textual data and the use of computer software to search for them appear to render the general approach akin to standardised survey or experimental design procedures. In our view qualitative research is not enhanced by poor imitations of other research styles and traditions. Analytic procedures which appear rooted in standardised, often mechanistic procedures are no substitute for genuinely 'grounded' engagement with the data throughout the whole of the research process. It is worth noting that the 'usefulness' of such computer programmes imply that you have collected and inputted all of your data, and this suggests that data collection and data analysis are discrete and linear.

There are various evaluations of the methodological and practical value of various software applications. The general approach has spawned its own area of expertise. Here we wish to note that many of the analytic strategies implied by code-and-retrieve procedures are tied to the specific inputting requirements of computer software strategies. As a consequence, there is an increasing danger of seeing coding data segments as an analytic strategy in its own right, and of seeing such an approach as the analytic strategy of choice. That should not be the case. Coding segments of text, with or without the addition of analytic memoranda to selected segments, is by no means the only way of managing and manipulating data. It is not even the only way of thinking about the use of computers for qualitative data analysis. The qualitative research community should not endorse the computer-based code-and-retrieve strategy as the automatic approach to management and analysis. The computer-based handling of textual data is a useful extension of the capacities of word-processing and textual data storage. The indexing or coding of text in that context is a useful heuristic approach to the data themselves.

### Toward the future

We have juxtaposed two alternative tendencies in the analysis and representation of ethnographic research. On the one hand we have identified a tendency towards pluralism and polyvocality. Such an approach emphasises the variety of analytic strategies that are available, and equally emphasises the variety of representational modes that are open to the ethnographer. This position (or collection of positions) include those associated - broadly speaking - with a postmodern sensibility. On the other hand, we have a distinctly modern tendency towards a common approach,

approximating perhaps to an industry-wide 'gold-standard', based on an elementary set of assumptions and procedures for the organisation and management of qualitative data. While we have recognised the heuristic value of such procedures, we have been cautious as to their general effects and consequences if widely but uncritically adopted.

At Cardiff we have contributed to the thinking and literature of the debates and developments we have identified in this paper. To conclude we turn to a further development that might usefully be thought of as a possible future direction for the analysis and representation of ethnography. We believe that there is a use for computing strategies in contemporary and future ethnographic work, and we believe that unlike much of the code-and-retrieve computing, this approach represents a genuine and generic advance over manual methods of data management. We refer to the exploitation of hypertext and hypermedia techniques.

The normal conventions of text printed or otherwise, determine a linear, sequential mode of presentation and processing. The reader, to paraphrase Lewis Carroll, should start at the beginning, carry on until the end is reached, and then stop. Of course, even with printed words on the page, life is not exactly as rigid as that: one may start at the middle, one may skip sections; one may cheat and read the ending first. But the text itself is fixed in its linear form. Likewise, working with files of text on computers may equally involve a linear structure. Again, one may scroll up and down, or jump from the beginning to the end, one may (as with a novel) move to a bookmark. But the processes are often essentially the same. The idea underlying hypertext is essentially different and relies on a view that text is nonsequential.

Hypertext may not be an especially new idea, but it may prove to be one whose time has come. In essence, the underlying ideas are fairly simple. They are predicated on the view that the reader's relationship with a given text (such as a literary work or a work of reference) need not necessarily be restricted to the linear reading of that text in a predetermined sequence. Its approach is non-linear, more akin to browsing and following up cross-references. Hypertext software allows a reader to follow, and indeed to create, diverse pathways through a collection of textual materials. Hypertext applications thus support a much more interactive relationship between the text and its readers. Readers can, in a sense, become authors of their own reading; they are not simply the passive recipients of a determinate textual form.

This approach has exciting possibilities for qualitative researchers. Many people working with qualitative data - whether they use fieldnotes, interviews, oral history or documentary sources - feel frustrated by the necessity of imposing a single linear order on those materials. It is, after all, part of the rationale of ethnographic and similar approaches that the anthropologist, sociologist, historian, psychologist or whoever, recognises the complexity of social inter-relatedness. We recognise the over determination of culture, in that there are multiple, densely coded influences among and between different domains and institutions. It is, therefore, part of the attraction of hypertext solutions that a sense of dense interconnectedness is preserved - enhanced, even - while linearity is discarded.

The use of hypertext (and indeed hypermedia) is not an easy option. There will always be practical limitations, of course, and there are also limits placed by human

cognitive capacities. There is, for instance, the possibility that is widely recognised, of becoming lost in 'hyperspace' if the whole thing becomes too complicated, and the user cannot get back to where he or she started, or cannot navigate to where she or he actually wants to be. There is a practical and cognitive cost to be borne in return for abandoning the linear printed text. The demands on authors and readers can be considerable. We do not achieve greater complexity without some further investment of concentration and imagination.

The implementation of hypertext applications for the analysis, authoring (and reading) of ethnographic data would not absolve the ethnographer from writing his or her theorised account, and the tasks of writing sociological or anthropological commentary must also be accomplished. The hypertext may facilitate a more flexible and more densely linked set of relationships between 'data' and 'theory', but it does not remove them. the final construction of a hypertext ethnography may thus prove a costly and time-consuming effort. However the opportunities afforded by such approaches are potentially wide, especially when we enter the world not just of hypertext, but of hypermedia. It is possible to incorporate not just textual data, but information in other media as well. The ethnographer may look forward to a time when a reader can choose to hear extracts from interviews or other spoken data, or find video images when an expansion button is clicked on, or have a wide array of graphic images. the 'ethnography' itself might be published in hard copy, as a conventional book, but there might be another 'ethnography', consisting of an array of information stored in different media, accessed via a computer and a CD drive, through which the professional social scientist and the student or lay reader could navigate pathways and pick up information appropriate to their respective interests

and levels of sophistication. The systems and software all exist now, and qualitative researchers are starting to exploit them. Predictions in this area are often doomed to failure, and one would be foolish to try to second guess how and to what extent they will be taken up. There is no need to assume that all future ethnographers will become 'cyberpunks', and any more than one need predict that fate for all literary critics (even though the same opportunities exist in the humanities, and indeed are rather more advanced there than in sociology or anthropology). It is, however, worth noting that 1995 saw the publication of what was claimed to be the first anthropological monograph to be accompanied by an interactive compact disc (CD-i) (Kersenboom 1995).

We do not believe that all ethnographers should become users and navigators of hypertext and hypermedia systems now or in the near future. We do believe, however, that such applications deserve much more serious and systematic attention on the part of qualitative researchers than they have received hitherto. Indeed, it is the case that multimedia, interactive materials are now widely distributed commercially. Our point is not to claim that there is something uniquely sociological or anthropological in the use of such applications. On the contrary, it is the recognition that these modes of representation are becoming commonplace that leads us towards these observations. It is for the same reasons that we are sceptical about ethnographers using software in order to recapitulate existing modes of analysis and representation, rather than exploring more fundamental innovations.

It is not necessary to endorse all the criticisms of postmodernists, feminists and postcolonialist critics in order to recognise the value of research and representations



that allow for a plurality of analyses and interpretations. Likewise, it is not necessary to subscribe to the most extreme versions of textualism in ethnography to recognise that there is room for representations that are more open and more complex than are conventional ethnographic texts. We do not fall into the trap of thinking that hypertext is the embodiment of postmodernism, nor that it solves all the problems posed by critics of conventional ethnographic epistemology. We do, however, believe that the tasks of cultural exploration and representation will be invigorated by the systematic exploitation of such approaches. Indeed, we believe that in the near future, when virtual reality systems, global information links and the like will be commonplace, the traditional ethnographer, reliant on written texts for the primary means of representation and grounded in realist prose, could well seem like a dreadful anachronism.

#### Part 4

#### Working in Border Country

When I was first invited to act as a discussant in this symposium I thought about a title for my contribution which I thought could be called Working in Border Country or Working in Bandit Country. In the end I have chosen the former, although the latter might apply in the light of developments that have occurred in relation to ethnographic studies in Britain over the last twenty years, in which members of the 'Cardiff School' have made an important contribution. Indeed, ethnographers across the UK might feel that they have worked in 'Bandit Country' given that ethnography has often been 'sniped' at by members from a range of disciplines. Certainly, twenty years ago ethnography was trying to establish itself in disciplines such as sociology.

Surveys of teaching indicated that it was rarely taught, apart from three or four lectures in general courses on research methods (Wakeford, 1979; Burgess, 1979). Whole courses devoted to the subject were very much a late-1970s development and then only in a few isolated cases. The widespread use of ethnographic methods was very much something that occurred in the mid-1980s. Furthermore, the proponents of ethnography may feel that they have worked in bandit country as their projects and proposals have been 'ambushed'. Many have not been seen as central to the discipline or sufficiently mainstream to warrant support, or to warrant funding. Indeed, it is relatively rare to find research foundations willing to fund an ethnographic study. Instead, multi-site studies have had to be devised to acquire funds. Indeed, the Cardiff team, together with a team from Warwick, have recently been engaged in studies of postgraduate students in higher education (Burgess, 1994). At first we were asked to do the equivalent of Boys in White (Becker *et al*; 1961), but this time in respect of postgraduate social scientists. On reflection, Atkinson and Delamont, and I costed the whole proposal only to discover that it would probably have amounted to some ten times what we initially received to do our qualitatively based inquiry which predominantly used in-depth and unstructured interviews.

Some commentators might regard my description of working in bandit country with some cynicism. However, they may feel that the idea of working in border country is more appropriate. Indeed, many ethnographers and ethnographic studies have been confined until relatively recently to the borders of their discipline, partly on the basis of funding that is available, and partly on the basis that the invisible college of researchers engaged in ethnographic inquiry lacked seniority until just under ten years ago. With many British ethnographers becoming senior members of the profession, it

has been much harder to confine the activities to the borders of the disciplines, as strong networks have been able to flourish within and beyond the UK. However, there is also a symbolism associated with work in border country. Cardiff does exist near the border of England and Wales, and this, in itself, need to be examined.

### The Substantive Border

The geographical position of Cardiff has given rise to considerable potential for ethnographic inquiry. In particular Sara Delamont has often made the point that when studies are conducted in Britain it is often England that is the point of study, rather than the different countries that comprise the United Kingdom. Accordingly, she and her colleagues have often contributed studies based in Wales. In these circumstances, the Cardiff School has focused not so much on ethnography as a method, but ethnography as the study of culture. In this respect, the Cardiff ethnographers have provided a detailed portrait of the way in which schooling, training, and so on, operates within Wales and is informed by, and turn informs, a Welsh culture. Most recently they have been involved in a study sponsored by the Equal Opportunities Commission, that focuses on gender and schooling in the United Kingdom, where Cardiff has contributed on the Welsh experience.

The Cardiff team have also contributed ethnographies in a range of other areas, including Health and Higher Education. Here socialisation and occupational socialisation has played a key role, yet the studies that have been completed have also focused on a border or boundary. For example sociological studies in education have for far too long concentrated almost exclusively on schools rather than other

educational circumstances, and within the frame of schooling on those experiences that take place in state schools as opposed to independent schools (Burgess, 1986). In a refreshing way the members of the Cardiff school have conducted studies of education and schooling that go beyond the traditional secondary school. Furthermore, the Cardiff team have also examined independent schools, and educational circumstances beyond schools through studies of higher education. In this respect they bring new insights from the borders of subject areas and share these insights using concepts that have been traditionally associated with ethnographic enquiry. However, it is not just the substantive concerns that have been contributed by the Cardiff team.

### The Methodological Border

As the papers have demonstrated, the Cardiff ethnographers have made substantial contributions to ethnographic study and the development of ethnographic methods. This has been done not only through teaching the subject at undergraduate and graduate level, but also through research supervision of a whole range of doctoral theses that have focused on the systematic training of young researchers. Within this tradition the Cardiff School have resisted the temptation to argue the merits and demerits of qualitative as opposed to quantitative research, but rather have made strong statements about the way in which systematic ethnographic enquiry can be conducted. The major members of the team have produced their own texts and readers which have had a major impact on the discipline of sociology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), and also provided a major contribution to sub-fields of sociology, especially health and healing and education (Delamont, 1992a). As Atkinson and Delamont's

work indicates they have paralleled much of what has gone on within the discipline and in methodological writing. In particular, they have contributed to the systematic study of social situations using a range of all collection procedures that are rooted within the tradition of symbolic interactionism, and which include observation, participant observation, unstructured interviews, narrative analysis, the use of documentary evidence, oral histories, and so on. However, they have also written on such topics as data analysis, writing and dissemination, and also the use of technology. Indeed, Amanda Coffey's paper indicates the way in which the work of founding members of the Cardiff School has been transmitted and extended by those who have worked as graduate students within the department. In particular, much work has been devoted to the use of technology and software programmes to help researchers analyse qualitative data. A distinctive feature of the Cardiff School has not been to discuss technology in a simplistic or technicist way, but rather to indicate how it can be used to aid the researcher in making more systematic and detailed use of their data, allowing researchers to develop a much stronger set of cases that can be developed from those data that have been collected and subsequently analysed. A further methodological strand in the work of the Cardiff team has been work on writing and dissemination. This has included Paul Atkinson's systematic inquiry presented in the Ethnographic Imagination (Atkinson, 1990), as well as Sara Delamont's practical assistance for postgraduate students who are developing research theses and dissertations for the first time. All these areas have been important for the development of sustained ethnographic enquiry. But they are also more important than that. The general requirement of the Cardiff team that sociologists should be reflexive about their activities has had an impact on the methodological work that has been conducted in the discipline. In that sense, the Cardiff ethnographers have shifted

reflexivity out from the borders of ethnography into the main stream of sociology.

Once again, we see that the discovery of yesterday is the common sense of today.

Many would regard the demand to be reflexive to be fundamental to the discipline, yet one only has to look at the books and papers produced some ten years ago to appreciate the novelty involved in this approach.

### Future Directions

The papers that have been presented in this symposium chart some major achievements that have occurred in British ethnography over the last twenty years that are well reflected in the contribution that has been made by the Cardiff School. Many of the changes that have occurred have had an impact upon the shape of sociological teaching and research in British higher education. New courses have been developed, new studies have been designed and more detailed portraits have been provided of people in Britain by ethnographers who have focused on social circumstances in their own society rather than in other societies. Furthermore, the work of ethnographers in Britain, and in Cardiff in particular, has resulted in individuals working not just on the deviant or the exotic, but also on a range of everyday circumstances, in hospitals, in schools, in further education colleges, in higher education, in accountancy firms, and so on.

Accordingly, we have learnt much about the conduct of ethnographic enquiry and the process of doing research where the researcher himself or herself, has been central to the tradition. However, the current exigencies of higher education, together with the limitations placed on funding has meant that classic ethnographic studies can no

longer be funded and conducted within British society with any ease. The idea of the lone researcher conducting a single study over a long time period is very much a dwindling vision. Accordingly, British ethnographers need to think about ways forward. To what extent is it that ethnographers need to think about:

1. The use of mini case studies which provide insights into fundamental processes across a range of sights. This might lead to the development of longitudinal case study work, or indeed, to multi-site case study work.
2. Researchers need to consider ways in which data analysis might be more systematic in this area so that we understand not only the use of technology and software programmes but also the way in which concepts and theories can be used in order to reach a greater understanding of the situations we observe.
3. We need to consider the time-scales over which ethnographic studies can be conducted. What is the ideal period for an ethnographic study? To what extent can grounded theory play a part in de-limiting the field of study and also promoting data that are reliable and valid?
4. How can different methodological approaches be brought to bear so that we no longer talk about ethnography as an approach that competes with the survey, but rather complements the survey in order to provide new insights into areas of social life.

## Conclusion

The Cardiff School has provided insights into the development of the ethnographic tradition in Britain in general and in sociology in particular. It is hard to imagine that some twenty years ago, when Paul, Sara, Martyn Hammersley and I were postgraduate students, there were very few ethnographic studies of British social life, with the result that reading lists relied heavily upon an anthropological literature. We have attempted to change all that partly by conducting ethnographic studies, and partly through contributions that we have made to establishing a methodological literature. The consequence is that we have pushed forward the borders of our discipline and pushed forward the boundaries of our subject. But this is something that is constantly being done by scholars working in a range of traditions, and the Cardiff School is no exception. Here a new generation of researchers are beginning to push forward into new substantive areas and new methodological terrain which will, in turn, inform the discipline of sociology and promote the advanced study of detailed aspects of British society. Long may they continue with this important work.

### Notes

1. We recognise that there are, of course, other modes of ethnographic representation, including film. They are as conventional and artful as any written text (cf Crawford and Turton 1992; Loizos 1993).

2. A longer version of this paper was published in volume 1 of *Sociological Research OnLine* (1996).



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## **Appendix A: Theses submitted at Cardiff 1974 - 2001**

These are listed under the headings of educational, medical, occupational, sex, gender and sexualities and 'other'. There are PhD theses and what are now called MPhil theses. (In the 1970s and early 1980s these were called Msc Econ theses)

### Educational

- Author : Beynon, John  
Initial encounters in a comprehensive school: an ethnography;  
(thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College,  
Cardiff in 1983)
- Author : Darmanin, Mary  
Title : Sociological perspectives on schooling in Malta; (thesis  
presented for the degree of PhD at University College of Wales  
Cardiff in 1990)
- Author : El-Samman, Mohammed Essa  
Title : Social relationships, adaptive behaviour and achievement in a  
school for the blind; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at  
University College of Wales at Cardiff in 1993)
- Author : Lloyd, N.A.  
Title : A place of learning: defining the problem, redefining the self:  
an ethnographic study of an adolescent psychiatric unit; (thesis  
presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff  
in 1987)
- Author : Renold, Emma

- Title : Presumed innocence: an ethnographic exploration into the construction of gender and sexual identities in the primary school (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at Cardiff University in 1999)
- Author : Salisbury, Jane
- Title : Becoming qualified: an ethnography of a post-experience teacher training course; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University of Wales College at Cardiff in 1994)
- Author : Shone, David
- Title : The social organisation of seminar talk; (thesis submitted for the degree of Msc (Econ) at University College, Cardiff in 1981)
- Author : Todd, Stuart
- Title : Not everybody knows: an ethnography of stigma and knowledge in a special school; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University of Wales at Cardiff, 1995)

#### Medical

- Author : Bunton, Robin Brian
- Title : Reproducing psychiatry: an ethnographic study of entry to an occupation; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff in 1986)
- Author : Davies, Ruth M
- Title : The happy end of nursing: an ethnographic study of initial encounters in a midwifery school; (thesis presented for the

degree of Msc in Methods and applications of social research,  
University College, Cardiff in 1985)

Author : George, Alison

Title : Social and cultural aspects of menstruation: an ethnographic  
analysis; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University  
of Wales College of Cardiff in 1989)

Author : Parsons, Evelyn P

Title : Living with Duchene muscular dystrophy: women's  
understanding of disability and risk; (thesis presented for the  
degree of PhD at University of Wales College of Cardiff in  
1990)

Author : Rees, Colin

Title : The social organisation of the medical record; (Dissertation  
presented in candidature for the degree of MSc Econ at  
University College, Cardiff in 1981)

Author : Taraborrelli, Patricia

Title : Tapestries of dementia: exploring caregiving biographies;  
(thesis presented for the degree of PhD at Cardiff University  
1996)

#### Occupational

Author : Carter, Keith William

Title : The occupational socialisation of prison officers: an  
ethnography; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at the  
University of Wales College of Cardiff in 1995)

Author : Coffey, Amanda,

Title : Double entry: the professional and organisation socialisation of graduate accountants; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at the University of Wales College of Cardiff in 1993)

Author : Parry, Odette

Title : The journalism school: the occupational socialisation of graduate journalists; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff in 1988)

Author : Pithouse, Andrew,

Title : Social work: the social organisation of an invisible trade; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff in 1984)

#### Sex, Gender and Sexualities

Author : Davies, Peter Michael

Title : The control of disclosure: a sociological study of networks and gay identity; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff in 1983)

Author : Parry, Odette

Title : Campaign for respectability; a study of organised British naturism; (thesis presented for the degree of Msc Econ at University College, Cardiff in 1982)

Author : Pilcher, Jane

Title : Social change and feminism: three generations of women, feminist issues and the women's movement; (thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D at University of Wales College of Cardiff in 1992)

Author : Scourfield, Jonathan B.  
Title : Changing men: U.K. agencies working with men who are violent towards their women partners; (thesis presented for the degree of M.A. at University of Wales College of Cardiff in 1994)

Author : Scourfield, Jonathan B.  
Title : The construction of gender in child protection social work; (thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D at Cardiff University in 1999)

Author : Stephens, Christina Anne  
Title : The management of a female homosexual identity; (thesis presented for the degree of Msc Econ at University College, Cardiff in 1982)

Author : Thomas, Michelle  
Title : Foreign affaires: a sociological exploration of 'holiday romance' (thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D at Cardiff University in 1999)

Author : Wincup, Emma  
Title : Waiting for trial: living and working in a bail hostel; (thesis presented for the degree of Ph.D at Cardiff University in 1997)

Other

Author : Davies, Paul Beynon  
Title : The role of the computer in ethnography; (thesis presented for the degree of PhD at University College, Cardiff in 1984)

## Appendix B : Selected Publications

The work of the Cardiff School is showcased in the Cardiff Papers in Qualitative Research Series, published by Ashgate. A full list of the 23 volumes already published, and those planned, can be found at [www.ashgate.com](http://www.ashgate.com). The PhD theses by Pithouse, Pilcher and Todd are monographs in the series, while most of the edited collections contain papers by the higher degree students.