

Panel 11

IVSA Conference 2009

Appreciating the views: How we're looking at the social and visual landscape

Panel Title	
Esc: no escape – the effects of digital technology on methodologies of visual enquiry	
Description	
<p>Cities are genuine hubs of cultural expression and unusually rich exponents of visual culture. Urban (visual) cultures emerged out of human imagination, ambitions and desires, numerous intentional and unintentional choices, concerted and rival actions. Buildings, streets, squares, parks, monuments, shopping malls and other urban artefacts - the newly emerging, long-established or the barely surviving - eloquently testify of these past and present ways of thinking and doing, and together with the multi-formed activities of its inhabitants and visitors constitute the complex human and material fabric of the city. The social and cultural fabric of the city for many years has been the focal point of visual sociologists studying important issues such as social change (Rieger), gentrification (Suchar), ethnicity (Gold, Krase) etc. But the cultural space of the city is truly limitless with regard to sociologically relevant aspects and themes with a significant visual dimension.</p> <p>This session comprises contributions that offer a refreshing theoretical and/or empirical view on visual aspects of cities as (multi)cultural spaces par excellence.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	Paul White, Auckland University of Technology
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Paper Title	
Landscape in an age of information overload: the impact of billboards in the 21st century	
Description	
<p>Even before the giant eye glasses on the billboard in F. Scott Fitzgerald's <i>The Great Gatsby</i> gained notoriety, billboards (or posters as they are known in Europe) have been considered by many to be a blot on the landscape. Yet billboard advertising is alive and well in the 21st century. This paper investigates three billboard advertising campaigns created in 2007 and 2008 which had a dramatic impact on the landscape (rural and urban) in which they were placed. Building on Jones's notion of sites of engagement as sites of attention (Jones, 2005) and using Norris's concept of modal density (2004) the paper also shows how the age of information overload is forcing billboard creators to find new ways of getting attention and keeping attention. The paper includes a discussion of how digital media extends the audience of the 21st century billboards studied and how the digital media not only provide new ways for social actors to interact with billboards, it also provides very different experiences from the same initial data. The paper concludes by contrasting two ways of presenting the data (statically in print and dynamically online) and discusses how this might affect subsequent analysis.</p>	

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Paper Title	
Hypermedia anthropology: anthropology without researcher?	
Description	
<p>Internet development produces unknown changes in social practices. More than the mail, the telephone or the mobile phone, internet enhances the interpersonal communication at distance. As the payment doesn't depend on to the real time of the communications, the use of internet is almost completely free. This characteristic of internet communication allows a telepresence that can call into question the very concept of the distance.</p> <p>Webcams and softwares like Messenger highlight new social practices allowing more and more contemporary users to spend more time at distance than in face-to-face interactions (in private and professional spheres).</p> <p>The role of anthropology is to help us for understanding this main evolution in the regions and the landscapes that are concerned. This situation obliges the researchers to innovate both in epistemology and methodology. Thus, to study social groups using webcams at home or in businesses, we follow methods of Virtual Ethnography (Hine 2000 & 2005). We would like to show that it is not necessary for the researcher to share the same place with people he studies and that he can do his research (by interviewing people) without being in real presence with them.</p> <p>This approach can be amazing and is also considered by some people as a more stage for the end of anthropology. We defend that Hypermedia Anthropology (Pink, 2006) with the production of interactive films, online images in movement or photographs, permits anthropologists to understand more in depth these new social practices. Such a reflexive methodology (in research object) allows us to analyse multimodal interaction (Coggins, 2004) and current practices of telepresence (Weissberg, 1999). This is a big challenge asking us to have a multidisciplinary method. We would like to explain the interest of using Semiotic and Phenomenology in conjunction with Hypermedia Anthropology and will show in our presentation the visual results.</p>	

Name:	Matteo Vergani, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan
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Paper Title	
Digital visual sociology	
Description	<p>The digital revolution, penetrating the entire society until the daily life routines of ordinary people, forces the social scientists to re-think methods and techniques of investigation. This is an even more urgent need for scientists dealing with images, hardly hit by technological change. The centrality of the digital mediascape and the participatory culture not only encourages the increase of new research fields, tools, contexts and spaces of relationships, but also calls the function of the researcher into question. The Web is a constantly changing environment, and the high circulation of images on the internet generates a huge amount of social phenomena. For example, new ideas come from the so-called "sociology of the Web 2.0", and from the audio-visual Web; new techniques are required for successfully using the search engine tools within the Web 2.0 services; new skills of auto-reflection are growing in the people born and raised within the digital culture. I propose to divide the existing visual techniques in mono-dimensional and multi-dimensional ones, where the first ones are the techniques in which the meanings of images come out from the interaction between the researcher's subjectivity and the image itself. The second typology of techniques, the multi-dimensional one, includes the techniques in which the meanings of images come out from the (social) interaction among the researcher, the natives and the image. I argue that the social researcher needs not only to re-think the technical tools for collecting and analyzing images within the frame of mono-dimensional techniques, but also to understand the new possible ways of social interactions with the natives, re-shaping also the multi-dimensional techniques. The paper arise from field notes that I've been taking in the last years. I will use examples from my research experience for arguing my intuitions.</p>

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Paper Title	
Thinking about on line visual research	
Description	
<p>We are living in a very special and crucial moment. Never in the history of humanity have we been able to see and comment upon so many of our own images. The different visual platforms allow us to watch millions of images no matter whose they are. Whenever and wherever, photographs, videos and video clips are quick eye-catchers at a simple click. Distance and time seem to change, to be even more relative, but oddly, both seem to be visually palpable. An enormous part of the Internet's information consists of images and visual data. Digital native youth probably know more than their own teachers about how to send, save, manipulate, archive and communicate through images.</p> <p>In spite of not being a digital native myself, I have decided to do research on a fascinating topic, which is mobile imaging. I first started through a camphone-video case study. Then trying to grasp the bigger picture I analyzed the camphone-video sharing platform Qik http://qik.com. By studying this platform, I have been exploring what we film and how we share it, because, fortunately, today online video, streaming media, collaboration and social media are converging. My aim is to enable us to continue to better understand how the camphone-technology is changing the production and sharing of domestic mobile videos.</p> <p>How can all the online information one finds (or not) guide our methodology? Taking as example my own experience, I would like to discuss how the use of digital media actually shaped and still shapes my own research and understanding of theory and method when analyzing real-world data. Share my work in process and in progress...because in some way, it also consists in learning and then being able to teach how to do research on line.</p> <p>New media technologies enable different ways of looking and (not) looking (May and Hearn: 2005, Pauwels: 2008, Rubinstein and Sluis: 2008). Camphone-videos ease the creation of mobile visual social networks but social media patterns of use definitely need to be more deeply understood.</p>	