

## Panel 1

### IVSA Conference 2009

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

Panel Title	
<b>The Urban Landscape: sociological perspectives on urban visual culture</b>	
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

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Paper Title	<b>Thirty six views of Flagstaff Hill: Images of social place and practice at a juncture of divergent urban areas</b>
Description	<p>This presentation of images and analysis portrays work in progress on an exploratory photographic portfolio of Flagstaff Hill in central Melbourne. The project has been stimulated by Hokusai's 1830s woodblocks of Mt Fuji and Rees' recent photos of Mt Baker. However it (perhaps ironically) moves well away from using a visually spectacular mountain as its organising motif. Instead, it uses the visually unimposing but historically noteworthy Flagstaff Hill as a marker to locate some social disjunctures in the urban landscape within which Melbournians navigate everyday urban life, and so enact the drama of the mundane.</p> <p>With his 36 Views of Mt Fuji, Katsushika Hokusai famously transformed Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints by introducing a western landscape aesthetic to portray a variety of social views and landscapes, all contextualized by Mt Fuji even when it only appeared as a minor component in an image. In the process, he arguably not only changed the ukiyo-e art form, but also provided a new visual narrative of changing Japanese self-understanding positioned by the enduring iconic landmark of Mt Fuji (Bouquillard 2007). This has inspired varieties of homage and imitation in woodblocks of Fuji and photographs of other major landmarks. A recent example is Rees' photographic portfolio of 36 views of Mt Baker, a visually impressive and well known free-standing mountain in North America (Rees n.d.). Although Rees includes sociological context in some images, generally a scenic aesthetic dominates his social narrative more than in Hokusai's work, and much more than I aim for in this portfolio (Muetzelfeldt 2009).</p> <p>In this portfolio the key motif is a visually minor location – Flagstaff Hill in central Melbourne – which is located at the edge of three distinct urban areas and which has lost its former historical importance. The portfolio is visually themed and given an historical and geographical anchor by the constraint of including Flagstaff Hill in each image. This evokes the history that this motif represents, and explores the urban forms that abut it and that result from and express 170 years of change and urban management in inner Melbourne.</p> <p>In 1835 Melbourne was established as an isolated British colonial settlement on a plain a few kilometres from its port. A slightly elevated area just outside the town provided a vantage point from which the port could be seen, and in 1840 a flagstaff was erected there from which flags announced the occasional but always important arrival of ships, the town's only link to the outside world. This area – Flagstaff Hill – became a major social reference point and meeting place. A clock ball was installed that marked noon each day, shipping news was posted on a notice board, and major events were held there – most notably the 1850 announcement of Victoria as a separate colony. The gold rush of the 1850s brought decades of affluence, rapid growth and new communication links to Melbourne. Telegraphy was introduced in 1854, replaced the Flagstaff Hill signalling flags in 1857, and connected to Sydney and Adelaide in 1858. In 1857 part of the hill was excavated to provide a cutting for a roadway. With these changes Flagstaff Hill quickly became unimportant and derelict, but was rehabilitated as Flagstaff Gardens in the 1880s (CHU 2008, Melbourne 2009). Overland travel between towns developed, and a railway link to Sydney was completed in 1881. As Melbourne spread outwards and the arrival of ships became commonplace and less important, the previous significance of Flagstaff Hill faded from popular memory. Its history is now acknowledged by a flagstaff and commemorative plaques, but these seem to be generally unnoticed except as curiosities, and the historical references have no importance in popular celebration.</p> <p>Today, Flagstaff Gardens is a small urban park taking up a city block at the junction of three distinct</p>

urban areas. To the south and east, there is the rapidly expanding office and residential high-rise central business district. In the north-east, a long-established major market for fresh produce and low-cost goods now has practical and iconic status as a community and tourist destination. And to the north and west, newly gentrified medium rise housing and offices are replacing the nineteenth century urban fabric of inner city small 'manufactories', warehouses and working class housing. Facing the gardens are a four star hotel, a major law court building, run down warehouses now used for car parking, two brothels, gentrified housing, and high rise office buildings. The once important view to the port is now obscured by medium rise buildings, but no one seems to miss it.

The images in this portfolio all use Flagstaff Hill as a marker to locate them as components in a social narrative of the enactment of everyday urban life in contemporary inner Melbourne. The immediate gardens are not themselves a major visitors' destination, and most users are from one or the other of the three urban areas described above. The tapestry of use varies with the rhythms of the day, week and season. Early morning and evening is the time for joggers and dog walkers. Weekdays bring out lunching office workers, and people who have had business at the law court. Early evenings and weekends attract people stepping out from their apartments or taking a break from their visit to the markets; and also picnicking families, and couples enjoying or negotiating their relationships, or not. Later at night the gardens are mostly deserted except for homeless people and the indigenous possums which, although not domesticated, are controlled by passive tree protectors. These protectors resonate with the signs requiring dog owners to actively control their pets. As with the animals, the lawns, plants and trees in these gardens are managed and contained – this is a highly cultured representation of nature that is planned to provide an oasis in the urban desert of asphalt, concrete, glass and traffic.

Standing back to gain deeper perspective, Flagstaff Hill provides a visual focus for images of diverse urban fabric and urban life that give context to the immediate activity in the gardens. The social mix of people in the gardens reflects the urban social mix that surrounds it. The dissimilar users in the garden appear to coexist with tolerant indifference to one another, as do the geographically close but socially different urban areas that surround it. Together, the people and the urban fabric mirror the civic culture of contemporary urbanism.

Goffman provides my sociological inspiration for this portfolio. I experience reading his ethnographies as a series of "I almost knew that" moments – small but important insights in which tacit knowledge surfaces and becomes explicit, or in which specific knowledge takes on wider significance. Even as he describes situations and events that differ from my experience, he evokes underlying ways of understanding and modes of social being that connect to my experience, and that validate and illuminate his cases even as they give me insight into mine. These Flagstaff Hill images ideally aspire to surface and make poignant the drama of the mundane in everyday life, as Goffman does through his writing.

Much photographic work achieves its impact through the dramatic potential of a single image. This may be through visual composition and use of light and shadow, often reflecting a strong film noir influence. Or it may be through social subject matter that evokes pathos, apprehension or shock, such as images of the life-weary and weather worn faces of homeless people. Some images of this type have become politically or socially important through the narrative work subsequently done with them – e.g. Riis' (1890) revealing although sensationalist photojournalism depicting life in New York tenements in the 1880s, or Út's (1972) photo of a Vietnamese girl running from her napalmed village. This narrative work is possible because these images are startling or unexpected. They are open to dramatic reading because they contain antenarrative elements that have not yet been normalised by being incorporated into pacifying narrative frameworks (Boje 2001). A rather different example of this is the dramatic potential that may come from the passage of time, because social subject matter that was culturally 'ordinary' in it's day now strikes us as unusual.

Such drama of the special contrasts with the drama of the mundane evoked by Goffman's ethnography. So this Flagstaff Hill portfolio eschews the drama of individual images. Instead, it aims to evoke the drama of the mundane through the interaction between the images, rather than in the

drama of individual ones.

There are two dominant aspects to the methodology I follow in reaching towards this objective. First, the portfolio draws on the techniques of repetition, juxtaposition and sequencing across the collection of images – techniques brought to prominence by artists such as Ray Metzker and Andy Warhol (AMICA 2007; Ganis 2004), and analysts such as John Berger (1972). Goffman (1979) used these techniques to bring to the fore the sexist codes in advertising – codes that were not apparent by viewing advertisements in isolation. As well as repetition, sequencing and juxtaposition, I use typification to playfully and seriously use several standard image types – such as the postcard, the scenic photograph, the visual social commentary, etc. – to build this portfolio. In doing so, I aim to provide commentary not only on the urban life and landscape around Flagstaff Hill, but also on the ways in which we – that is, we as everyday social participants and also as sociologically literate analysts – view and make sense of the mundane everyday life that infuses our practice and action as we live out contemporary urbanism.

As a second methodological move, I use the structure and organisation of Hokusai's 36 Views as a suggestive outline for this portfolio. I work with the social and visual criteria of his images (such as season, time of day, human activity in relationship to nature, and visual themes, etc.) to suggest criteria for my images. I do this not to blindly mirror his portfolio, but rather to provoke me to see and record more than I would do if I were to just follow my eye and my sociological senses.

At a maximum of 40 metres above sea level, Flagstaff Hill lacks the presence of My Fiji (3,776 m) and Mt Baker (3,275 m). Yet it has its place in Melbourne's history, and continues to have a place in the professional narratives of historians, urban planners and tourism promoters (Melbourne 2000; 2009). Importantly, it also has its place in the everyday life of urban residents and visitors who may well be unaware of those professional narratives. Today, it marks a juncture of distinct urban areas – a juncture that is recognised by urban sociologists, but which may pass unnoticed or be experienced differently by those enacting their everyday lives in the neighbourhood. As such, it provides a motif to give focus to this Goffmanesque photo-ethnography of the mundane dramas through which people present their selves in everyday life within the civic culture of contemporary urbanism.

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Paper Title	
<b>"Killadelphia": violent death in the visual culture of an American city</b>	
Description	
<p>A striking feature of the contemporary American city is the mass of official and unofficial images, signs and other graphic interventions which now shape the urban environment as a distinctive visual landscape. This landscape includes an ever-expanding universe of commercial advertising and billboards; municipal signage of every description and kind; officially-sponsored public art including murals, mosaics, and frescos; and a profusion of graffiti, posters, stencils and other forms of unofficial wall art. Generally speaking, the recent explosion of urban imagery signals a shift in the definition and control of public space, as well as reflects the development of new technologies of mechanical and digital image reproduction.</p> <p>In this paper I explore one aspect of this emerging visual landscape: the ways in which lethal urban violence is increasingly registered, recorded, and memorialized within a city's visual culture. My focus is Philadelphia, a city which as an original center of modern graffiti innovation has long played a key role in the evolution of urban visual culture and which today continues to offer a remarkably rich terrain of study. Moreover, Philadelphia is currently the most violent large city in the United States; here issues of violence and death increasingly shape, influence and haunt the visual landscape of the city.</p> <p>To begin, I review perspectives on the social construction urban visual culture, including conceptualizations of landscape as "composer and transmitter of cultures" in which visual manifestations frame accounts of economic, social and cultural processes; I review also discussions of the part played by official and unofficial memorials in mediating the collective and individual experience of violent death resulting from war and terrorism within American history.</p> <p>I then develop a typology of urban memorials distinguishing between formal and informal, sanctioned and unsanctioned, temporary and permanent, and physical and virtual public memorializations of those who have died as a result of criminal violence, or are victims of other forms of violent death including fire, drag-racing, traffic and bicycle accidents and distant wars. On the basis of systematic photographic documentation, I assemble a comprehensive inventory of urban memorials including official and unofficial murals, large-scale graffiti wall art paying homage to deceased gang members and the like, stickers and stencil art, posters and billboards, and street and roadside shrines, plaques and crosses.</p> <p>Of particular importance in shaping urban visual culture are conflicts which emerge as groups and individuals seek to use public space to recall, memorialize, or otherwise comment on violence in civic and political life. Here I discuss and document several controversies concerning efforts to incorporate urban violence into public visual culture including: rejection by the city offers to install anti-violence posters on the city's bus shelters; a campaign to mark with a plaque the site of every law enforcement officer killed in the line of duty in the history of the city; the resistance of the city's massive Mural Arts Program to address issues of urban violence in its public art projects; and subversive efforts to raise awareness of Iraq war deaths by the city's graffiti underground. By looking at the linguistic, graphic and aesthetic issues framing these controversies, those legal, bureaucratic and other forces shaping the urban visual world are revealed.</p> <p>This project is part of a larger sociological and aesthetic study of new forms of urban art and imagery. Here I aim to (i) develop a comprehensive categorization of the principal graphic elements or components shaping the visual culture of cities today; (ii) suggest how both official and unofficial forms of public imagery contribute to a cultural theory of landscape; (iii) identify social, cultural, and technological factors which explain the form, variety and spatial distribution of such visual elements</p>	

within the urban environment; and (iv) explore ways in which public space forms a contested terrain where competing interests promote, limit or otherwise control visual elements within the urban landscape.

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Paper Title	
<b>Visualizing the social life of walls</b>	
Description	<p>In his short essay on doors and bridges, Georg Simmel famously argued that, while doors 'speak', walls are 'mute'. But, materially and visually speaking walls are hardly irrelevant, even when they are not symbolically charged. In particular, urban walls are powerful artifacts that strategically impact upon bodies in meaningful ways and, in their turn, are used and 'détourned' tactically for a variety of purposes. On the one hand, walls are governmental, or biopolitical objects; on the other hand, they are environmental affordances somewhat 'scattered' through the urban landscape. In my paper I would like to reflect on how we could theorise and visualise the social life of walls.</p> <p>On the basis of a series of cases and examples, I suggest to consider the features of materiality, territoriality, visibility, rhythm and use (or coupling, affect) as analytical dimensions to be taken into account for a sociological study of walls. It is also important to remind that 'wall' is in fact an umbrella term and a shorthand for a series of wall-like artifacts, that is objects that are primarily aimed at creating and sustaining some sort of boundary. Approaching this object of study we should not expect visual uniformity, rather a complex interweaving of material and relational elements. In other words, we should examine the emerging patterns and chains of action and reaction among heterogeneous elements present in the urban environment.</p>

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Paper Title	
<b>Street Discourse: A Visual Essay on Urban Signification</b>	
Description	
<p>Cities serve numerous practical, functional, symbolic, ritual and ideological ends. Many of which have an undeniable visual dimension. Therefore the city can be literally looked at from different angles that often refer to different orders of signification: the use of space, the types, means and degree of control, mobility, fashion, cultural diversity, entertainment, tourism, commerce, personal, interpersonal and group behaviour, the public and the private sphere. Much of this has materialized in numerous artefacts and behaviours. Cities are both emanations and reproducers of power and control. Sites of planning, control and conformism. Yet at the same time the urban context is a token and a breeding ground for resistance, for loss of control, for renewal, for deliverance. The multiple intermeshing discourses – the historic, the political, the social, the multicultural, the commercial, the religious etc. - provide the city its unpredictable, multilayered, never fully graspable character. Therefore cities constitute at once a battle field of conflicting interests, a playground for ideas and a theatre for our senses, orchestrated by different agents with different temporal referents and audiences in mind.</p> <p>In an effort to read the plethora of signs, or to document and understand the awkward melting pot of messages that are bombarded to the city dweller, photographers and visual researchers may choose to record in a more or less systematic manner the various aspects of urban visual culture. Alternatively, they may focus on what is strange or edifying in its own right, or they may try to metaphorically reinforce, clarify, amplify or even try to twist (a Situationist-like 'détournement') the possible meanings of the pro-filmic event through the expressive choice of a particular vantage point or moment, or by skilfully employing one of the many but often unnoticed parameters or signifiers of the representational apparatus. The latter approach may yield new ways of looking, which may help to reveal and explore the borderlines of that which is inexplicable or even hard to imagine.</p> <p>The visual essay is far from being a simple and unchallenged or widely accepted scientific practice. This should not be a surprise since to date the large majority of scientists still consider the use of imagery incompatible with the true nature of science. The social scientific importance of the camera images resides both in the unique though problematic relationship they have with the depicted reality and in its related practices that are closely intertwined with culture at large. This presentation both discusses the visual essay as a mode of visual sociology and shows a visual application of this mode to the urban context.</p>	

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Paper Title	
<b>Fascist Semiotics in Rome's Foro Italico</b>	
Description	
	<p>This paper consists of a slide show that details the contemporary Roman sports facility, "Foro Italico," which was constructed during the fascist era and played an important part in the sports culture of the fascist regime. The images show the layout of the original stadium and its modification for contemporary use. Image sequences show the matching city statues lining the original playing field that develop regional fascist themes, mosaics that glorify the fascist regime and the invasion of Ethiopia, and marble blocks lining the entrance of the Foro that note important dates in the fascist era, and the era that followed. Other image sequences show sculptures and architectural styles that communicate fascist themes.</p> <p>The paper poses the question of how Rome processes its problematical collective memory. Foro Italico is but one element in a pervasive fascist semiotic in modern Rome, but it is a particularly potent symbol system, given the continued importance of sports culture in Italy and the continued used of facilities that are visually linked to a discredited historical era. The paper is an element in a larger project on the Italian interpretation of its fascist past.</p>