

Panel 25

IVSA Conference 2009

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

Panel Title	
'With an artists eye' – interpreting social environments	
Description	
<p>Artists are special. They articulate the world through their unique viewpoint and modes of expression, and offer the rest of us the chance to then participate and share in their vision – if we dare. Sociologists are special too, in that they implicitly claim to have recognition and evaluation skills that see meaningful structure and order in the social environment we all occupy. Of course, such narrow taxonomies are becoming increasingly redundant in our postmodern age when everything is a potential text, carrying snippets of meaning for those in touch enough to see and appreciate them, and also available for endlessly 'new' forms of montage or bricolage assembly.</p> <p>This panel asks questions like "what happens to that 'empirical' aspect of sociological tradition when visual meanings are so fragmented", and "are artists who use the effect of existing meaning traces in their original work actually harking back to that legacy of earlier 'common' meanings? Or "who has the greater claim to defining the transferable meaning of things: the observer who defines and measures, or the creator who continually re-defines?" In short, we think we're looking for an argument here, and expect this panel to be a site of contested debate.</p> <p>If you've a view, either as a practicing artist involved with anything that offers an environmental interpretation, (from public monuments to the most private and personal reflective pieces), or as a critic, evaluator, or simply recorder of the creative work of others, then please do contribute to this debate. Our remit is wide, and covers anything that touches on that interface of the interpretive artist with the community that receives and seeks to define meaning in the social contexts of their work.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	Kerry Hines, Victoria University of Wellington
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Paper Title	Archived landscapes and regenerating histories
Description	<p>In 1891 Professor Robert Wallace, Edinburgh University, published <i>The Rural Economy and Agriculture of Australia and New Zealand</i>, a book which reported on his fact-finding tour of the colonies two years earlier. The book included a chapter devoted to Whakaki, a North Island sheep station owned by his friend John Hunter Brown, as well as 16 photographs commissioned from William Williams which depicted the station and its rapidly changing landscape (taking in features such as a floating island, the station's flax mill, the work of creating field drains critical to the success of the farm, and neighbouring Maori settlements). The original negatives of these photographs are among an extensive archive of Williams's work held by the National Library in Wellington, and reproductions have appeared in a variety of contexts, including local histories – Maori and Pakeha – and, in 2008, a feature film.</p> <p>The Whakaki photographs also inform the creative writing research project in which I am writing poems that test, draw and build on readings of Williams's images and contextual information about them, with the intention of presenting poems and photographs co-medially (that is, presenting photographs and poems together so that neither merely illustrates the other, the integrity and autonomy of the photographs and poems as works in their own right are maintained, and the resulting work offers more than the constituent parts on their own). The poems draw on the images, primary and secondary sources by and about Wallace, Hunter Brown and Whakaki, and my own recent site visits to the region.</p> <p>This paper will discuss the origin of the Whakaki images and some of the ways in which they have been used and read, and will present a selection of the poems (with accompanying photographs) resulting from this creative-based research project.</p>

Name:	Pablo Hermansen & Rodrigo Salcedo, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile
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Paper Title	
The family garden as action and scene: photographic narrative about the presentation of two gardens	
Description	
<p>Usually, we think the city and its neighborhoods only as the product of successive urban planning and architectural projects. However, the produced spaces are inhabited by people who use them, and attribute meanings to them; transforming, with those operations, spaces into places. People, with their everyday practices, to a greater or lesser extent, impact the landscape that surrounds them. Consequently, landscape, meanings, and practices seem to be independent spheres, with its own logic.</p> <p>At the same time, the centrality of text in the representation of the city promotes a non symmetrical relation between practices, landscapes, and meanings. Practices and landscapes tend to be written, to be interpreted using the logic of textual reflection. The outcome of research tends to come from the practice of writing; which brings great benefits, but at the same times several restrictions to knowledge.</p> <p>If we want to expand our understanding of social reality, is necessary to use the precise media to register and to represent what happens around us. It is true that all research media omits certain aspects of a situation to highlight other. Is the script the best way to describe the everyday practices that alter the urban landscape? The quotidian practices are fundamentally actions. What if the meanings are structured by categories that emerge from the nature of the action? Finally, how can we incorporate the feelings and emotions that underlie the practices of production and research of our daily lives?</p> <p>This paper aims at knowing the subjective world that supports the daily practices of production and maintenance of gardens, while preserving the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of the study in the final document.</p> <p>To do this, we use photography to record the action thoroughly, demonstrating the gestures, the pace and intensity with which it develops. At the same time, research data are sorted narratively, and thus we preserve the relationship between practices, landscapes and meanings, while maintaining the aesthetic and emotional knowledge gained in the experience of field research.</p>	

Name:	Alexander Franklin, Bath Spa University
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Paper Title	
With an artist's methodology – artist as researcher	
Description	
<p>Artists aren't inherently special, but the methodologies that they use to engage with the world are.</p> <p>Researchers within the creative arts have much to offer those disciplines with a more 'empirical' tradition - such as sociology – as they consistently challenge the enduring acceptance of post-Enlightenment understandings of 'objective' academic discourse - which remains solidly founded on the Cartesian separation of subject and object.</p> <p>Whatever the area of study, the researcher's primary function is to 'read' texts – where 'texts' are understood to be anything that requires interpretation: including human geographies, material artefacts, physical data, academic literature, etc – and then offer up their reading as another text, which in turn can be read. Thus the researcher's position can best be understood as an interpretive matrix, wherein the traditionally distinct roles of reader and author merge to produce an illusory 'voice of a single person' (Roland Barthes, 1990. <i>Image, Music, Text</i>. p.143).</p> <p>This paper will outline how the reflexive practices of artists and creative arts pedagogs have much to offer the rigorous researcher in the articulation of their agentic authorship. Further, it will argue that it is only once the researcher's experience of being a 'Being' in the world has been examined - and 'this must be done explicitly, even at the risk of discussing the 'obvious'' (Martin Heidegger, 1997. <i>Being and Time</i>. p.81) - that the artificial separation of subject and object can be reframed and the postmodern threat of solipsistic relativism challenged.</p>	

Name:	Nela Milic, Goldsmiths, University of London
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Paper Title	
Balkanising taxonomy	
Description	<p>This paper is tracing the questions raised by the project "Balkanising Taxonomy" developed last year as part of the archive research at Goldsmiths Centre in Textiles. The project aimed to interrogate notions of Balkan identity, and trouble the impulse to create a stable taxonomic account of the Eastern European subject. Through the construction of protective preservation chambers (light-safe boxes sewn out of black felt), fetishized Balkan could only be encountered through a small peephole. Also, photographs of Balkan people were placed in glass jars, to ensure that they are not physically handled by the viewing public. The voyeuristic impulse hidden behind the project of preservation was exposed, where the boxes and jars claim to protect the objects from light and decay, but instead contribute to widening the gap between the (Western) self and (Balkan) other. The labels which accompanied the garments and photographs contained a mixture of factual and imagined information, once more calling into question the taxonomic urge, and highlighting the problematic process at work behind studying and representing the other.</p> <p>Through the methods of conservation employed in this project, which intensify the relationship between the merging of scientific and absurd classification practices, the curator hoped to contribute visually to the already vast field of study which questions the space from which the Balkan subject is formed.</p> <p>The journey through artefacts has been led through memory and this paper will focus on this discourse within Visual Sociology.</p>

Name:	Krisanne Baker, ecological installation artist and activist, Maine
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Paper Title	
Ecological art as gift: a means to facilitate positive changes in the world water crises	
Description	
<p>[This paper posits how ecological artists are leading a reversal of the current environmental entropy (particularly the world water crises) into strategic circumstances of regeneration. With an overview of five ecological artists' work, the audience will gain an understanding of how this type of work combines artistic intent with sociological, scientific, political, and, of course, environmental strategies as gift.]</p> <p>You may ask, "What is 'ecological art'?" Ecological artist Aviva Rahmani defines ecological art as "a practice often in collaboration with scientists, architects, key planners, activists, engineers and other artists that result in direct intervention in environmental degradation. Often the artist is the lead agent in this work." Concern for survival motivates and inspires ecological artists to look hard at situational catalysts and incorporate curative measures for the failing environment into their artistic practice. This process often involves scientific and site-specific research, as well as active collaboration within a community whose inhabitants' lives and areas of expertise touch upon or even produce the catalysts.</p> <p>'Threat to survival' is the concept that through further entropic decline , there will not be enough potable water, air to breath, healthy oceans to spawn fish, or arable land to sustain all living creatures on planet Earth. One huge environmental issue is a rapid decline of the Earth's lifeblood – particularly its' water quality and water availability (see www.watertreaty.org).</p> <p>In the case of worldwide waters and access rights to potable water, the paradigm of the crisis is that the minority (in this case politics and corporations) is transgressing the majority (the environment and its inhabitants). Ironically, the minority holds the power to control water through privatization and capitalization—or as Christopher Manes says, we are experiencing "economic rage against the marginalization of the underclass and the monolithic power of multinational corporations. And there is a growing green rage against the destruction of the Earth and its breathtaking profusion of life."</p>	