

Panel 27

IVSA Conference 2009

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

Panel Title	
Visual Sociology Practice	
Description	
<p>As noted by Sassen, cities are sites for the contradictions of the globalization of capital. Both the powerful and the more and less disadvantaged are concentrated in them. In the city variously marginalized people however also find their voices and often make claims on the city as "contested terrain." In the global city diversity is heightened and concentrated by migration and immigration. Despite the fact that the dominant, corporate culture, "inscribes noncorporate cultures and identities with 'otherness', thereby devaluing them, they are present everywhere." Immigrant communities and their informal economies are common examples of this process and there are many ways by which one can study these phenomena. This panel will explore how the meanings of urban spaces are created and changed by their new and old inhabitants. Global cities are paradigmatic sites for visual and symbolic competition between once dominant groups and those which are challenging them for local hegemony. There are many ways to document and illustrate contrasting and changing demography such as attention to commercial vernacular landscapes, "ethnic" graffiti, or other visual expressions of culture.</p> <p>Visual Sociology of contested spaces is not a mere aesthetic exercise. Today's cities on every continent are deluged by people from cultures distinct from native-born residents. Much can be learned by looking closely at small places and using what might be called a visual "glocal" perspective. Although diverse people frequently live within the same large-scale political boundaries, the real test of community takes place during the course of everyday life on the streets, shops, and public spaces of neighborhoods. Because of modern technology and world systems, increasingly, "cultural strangers" share common environments. Therefore exploring the question of how visual interactions might influence the possible of community in diversity becomes even more important.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name(s):	Gavin Perin & Linda Matthews, University of Technology, Sydney
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Paper Title	
The modern Picturesque and techniques of adaptation	
Description	
	<p>If the eighteenth century Picturesque can be regarded as a strategy employed by the elite to mediate visually the experience of the landscape as a projection of their social and political interests, then the proliferation of CCTV systems and their configuration into webcam networks that imagistically promote iconic city form can be seen as its contemporary counterpart. These pervasive digital systems, in their most voyeuristic and passive form as a new privileged vantage point for the 'remote' tourist to view the city, allow the present-day elite to curate the visual experience of the contemporary urban landscape. In so doing, the elite are able to frame, control and finally sanction representations of this landscape to accord to their idealized image. Yet, unlike the inherent formal stability of the Picturesque, the webcam's conversion of the real into the virtual provides viewers with a greater facility to adapt and mediate their experience. More important than this 'democratization' of people's engagement with the urban environment is the ability of this digital conversion to offer the designer new ways to materialize three-dimensional form. This extended interactive capacity of webcam content, as a digitally manipulated environment, paradoxically subverts the original surveillant role and the more recent promotional aspect of these systems and converts it into one that is qualitative and experiential.</p> <p>The paper, drawing on recently completed design-orientated research conducted at the University of Technology, Sydney, will discuss how an array of open-source digital softwares has been strategically recruited to process and interpret raw virtual qualitative data from webcam images to generate a formal response to civic space. This 'designerly' intervention back into three-dimensional space, through specific operational and technical properties associated with the digital manipulation of the two-dimensional webcam view, asks the designer to relinquish the images commonly used to substantiate urban form and to respond to duplicate virtual and real-time sites whose coexistence shifts the temporal framework traditionally used to guide formal intervention.</p> <p>The application of this unprecedented technique reveals an opportunity to reinterpret the paradigm both for our experience of 'virtual' and urban space and for material intervention within it.</p>

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Paper Title	Understanding Disaster Impact and Recovery
Description	<p>Recently reporters and ordinary citizens have delivered powerful images of the destruction caused by the Sichuan earthquake through video reports (e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmmgWoENFIY). Although these images are powerful and present important views on calamity, there are concerns with them being overly voyeuristic and leading to mass desensitisation. In addition, it is uncertain exactly how these images can actually benefit the people and communities being observed. This presentation describes the use of video in areas affected by the earthquake in Sichuan, China. We describe how mobile phones captured the aftermath of the earthquake in four visits to earthquake-affected areas: the effects of the earthquake on the landscape (e.g. a city near the epicentre, a temporary school, a devastated Buddhist temple) and on individual lives (e.g. families in temporary accommodation, aid workers running temporary schools). In one community, the fieldworker asked two community members to film aspects of their everyday lives via mobile phones. The fieldworker returned five days later to discuss the short video clips the community members produced. Overall, the visual material collected using a small, basic video cameras was vivid and expressive: it presented the dramatic changes caused by the earthquake through the eerie quietness and stillness of a usually bustling Chinese city, the positive spirit demonstrated by singing school children and the emphatic devastation of an ancient Chinese temple described by a monk. However, the video clips were not simply "strange tales of faraway places" (Crabtree et al, 2000) but, for the community, presented participants' views on their own recovery, their own stories untainted by political rhetoric: the everydayness of a temporary marketplace, the vastness of the temporary housing installed, the curiosity of a camel arriving. The familiarity and small size of the mobile phone seemed to make video capture less threatening.</p>

Name:	Łukasz Rogowski, The Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan
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Paper Title	Visual sociology - to see the sight. „Eye-interactions” in the city.
Description	<p>It is almost not possible to be visual sociologist without using photo- or video-cameras. But it is also not possible without trusting on your own sight. First, I trust that picture made by camera is real and reliable. Second, and more important, I trust that my sight affects on face-to-face interactions (changing them from „face-to-face”, which uses all others senses, to „eye-to-eye”).</p> <p>I would like to focus my speech on three main problems.</p> <p>First, I would like to answer the question if „eye-management” can influence on social interactions in the city environment (how manner of seeing/watching/gazing changes social practices).</p> <p>Second, I would like to focus on relations between sight and other senses, which have an influence on peoples' interactions in the city.</p> <p>Third, it is a problem of reliability of visual data made by photo- and video-cameras - it is possible to study this topic, basing only at digital pictures or movies.</p> <p>Erving Goffman's books, focusing on influence of sense of sight on everyday's interactions, would be a theoretical basis of my speech. Empirical basis would be pictures and movies made by Visual Sociology Workshop of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, showing „critical city interactions” (eg. coping with obstacles).</p>

Name:	Roger Brown, Staffordshire University
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Paper Title	Photography, Ongoing moments & strawberry fields
Description	<p>My paper is about photographic praxis and poiesis - about the activity of doing and making stills photographs.</p> <p>Recently Howard Becker when discussing stills photography as a research method wrote, "We now need to find ways of using visual imagery that will be natural and as acceptable...as other forms of data...Many people who work with visual materials have not realised that there are real skills involved and that you have to learn them, practise them, and keep them in mind as you do your research and prepare it for public presentation..." (Becker 2004 in Knowles & Sweetman 2004 'Picturing the Social Landscape' p195).</p> <p>I propose to differentiate clearly between the passive noun Photography and the active verb form Photographing. I am talking about Photographing - about engagement in the complex business of synthesising subject, ideas and theories, aesthetics and technical skills, with observation, meaning, description, understanding, interpretation and communication in the making of ethnographic documentary photographs. Photographing thus applies knowledge and thoughtful picture making skills to stills photography, whose teleological purpose is researcher created high quality photographs of value in their own right and of value to their empirical fieldwork, their analytical methodologies, reflexive critical interpretations and publication of their material.</p> <p>For Paul Strand, " Photography", he said, "was about Life". For Elliot Erwitt photography is an art of observation. "It is..." he said, "about finding something interesting in an ordinary place." and continued, "...I've found it has little to do with the things you see and everything to do with the way you see them...". His fellow Magnum photographer, David Hurn, has written that the fundamentals of photography come down to choice of subject, about which you must care, where to stand in relation to it and when to press the shutter. The best work, he writes, is made by those individuals, "...who have made it a point to understand their subjects about which they care deeply-and they also care deeply about the pictures...". To illustrate my theme I shall draw on the canon of photography and on my own recent photographic work on the redevelopment and regeneration of urban landscapes, industries and communities in North Staffordshire, UK.</p>

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Description	
Picturing Communication: Using Photography in Language and Communication Research	
Description	
<p>Doing research on language and communication, it might not seem obvious to apply visual methods. In our research project on the communication strategies of elderly migrants in Switzerland, we were looking for ways to get our informants not only to talk about their communicative experiences, but also to explore their wishes for new possibilities and to reflect on the meaning, communication holds for them in the context of their every day life. By the means of semi-structured interviews, this seemed to be difficult to achieve. Thus, we turned to a combination of participant observation with photo-elicitation interviews.</p> <p>This approach proved to be very productive, providing us both with new insights and additional levels of information. Experiences varied greatly, though, according to the individual informant's attitude towards pictures and their acceptance to see their life represented through the researchers eyes. Interestingly, the use of photographs had also a big impact upon the researcher's part. Taking pictures during participant observation provoked a deeper reflection of their role as well as of their perception of the others world. To develop the photo elicitation interview from the pictures later on opened new possibilities to convey the researcher's interest in, questions about and appreciation of the informant's life.</p> <p>In our presentation, we explore the reasons for this choice of methods, the experiences we made both methodologically and with regards to our findings and the implications we see for doing research in the communication field.</p>	