

## Panel 30

### IVSA Conference 2009

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

Panel Title	
Exploring Visual Dimensions of Society – A Case Study Forum	
Description	
<p>This panel is one of the results of the standard IVSA conference 'open call', which specifically offers a supportive platform to emerging postgraduate research which explores dimensions of the visual as part of its methodology. Though wide ranging in their scope, the case studies it contains all share that quality of approaching the visual in interesting ways, and collectively indicate something of how the terms 'visual' and 'sociology' are currently being linked within international postgraduate practice.</p>	
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Final Selected Papers

Name:	Harriet Shortt: University of Bath, UK
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Paper Title	
The Hair Salon – A landscape of identity	
Description	
<p>In my current PhD research, I have been examining organizational space, and exploring work spaces, the objects within them, and what role they play in the construction of employee identity. The key focus of the research is on how employees actively 'make' and construct their identities through and with their space and physical 'things' in their surroundings. This ethnographic fieldwork is located in a previously under-researched work space, with previously over-looked workers – Hair Salons and Hairdressers.</p> <p>In this paper, I examine how visual methods and respondent photography have helped inform the understanding of identity construction in relation to work spaces. I discuss the suitability and importance of using visual methods when researching such topics; the 'visual' gives the respondent another window through which to view everyday experiences, and articulate and narrate their identities.</p> <p>Specifically, I intend to discuss the importance of how the photographs were handled and viewed by respondents, during photo-interviews. The literal 'examination' and 'materiality' of the photographs was especially significant in these narratives. The hairdressers 'viewed' photographs of their work space in clusters, and not as individual images, and used several images at one time to illustrate one narrative. I argue, that viewing images of their work space (and identities) in this way, is much like viewing an abstract picture of a landscape; spaces, objects, and 'things' take up positions in the shifting foregrounds, mid-grounds and backgrounds of their working lives – a 'landscape of identity'.</p> <p>This evidence from photo-interviews demonstrates visual method and conceptual understanding merging to form a key finding and approach to understanding identity through the examination of space.</p> <p>Within this paper, in addition to sociological research, literature from art and design theory and landscape painting also help to shape and define, 'The Hair Salon - a landscape of identity'.</p> <p>Harriet Shortt is a PhD student in the Organizational Studies Group in the School of Management at the University of Bath. She has a keen interest in over-looked groups of workers and under-researched work spaces, and uses respondent photography in her research.</p>	



Name:	Alessandra Seggi, The New School for Social Research, New York
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Paper Title	
<b>In Light of the Darkness: Exploring the Cinematic Portrayal of Suicide</b>	
Description	
<p>The discipline of Sociology has focused its attention on self-inflicted deaths (Durkheim, 1951; Lester, 1989, 1990, 1994; Breault, 1986; Taylor, 1990; Moksony, 1990; Lester &amp; Young, 1991; Douglas, 1967; Pescosolido &amp; Mendelsohn, 1986). Sociology has also specifically analyzed suicide as an expression of violence: violence against the self (Henry &amp; Short, 1954; Gold, 1958; Lester, 1987). However, sociological studies on suicide in relation to media and film are to my knowledge relatively few.</p> <p>This paper aims at presenting my preliminary research for my dissertation on the cinematic representation of suicide. I accomplish this by applying existing analytical frameworks. For example, I use content analysis to examine how suicide is portrayed in film, very much like Bulman (2005) and Rubinfeld (2001) do when they study high school movies and Hollywood romantic comedies respectively. I then use Durkheim's typology of suicide to group the suicides as portrayed in film in different categories. My mapping involves only American films.</p> <p>I expect to have made significant progress between now and the conference date; therefore I expect to be able to articulate my thesis much more accurately and in detail than now. It would really be a priceless opportunity for me to present my work in such venue and gain precious feedback from experts in the field.</p> <p>Alessandra Seggi, a Fulbright scholar, holds an MA in Media Studies and is currently completing a Ph.D. in Sociology at The New School for Social Research in New York City, where she was a Teaching Fellow for the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 academic years. Her interests lie at the intersection of Sociology, Film, and Mental Illness. She has taught a variety of courses ranging from Sociology, Film, and Italian language.</p>	

Name:	Marco Tomassini, Università Cattolica of Milan
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Paper Title	
<b>Graffiti-writing. The city between under and overground</b>	
Description	
<p>The object of my PhD dissertation is the recent evolution of the graffiti-writing Italian scene, that, as in many other countries, has always found in the big, chaotic but at the same time vital urban spaces its 'natural' setting. To go more into details, my work proposes to analyze the social and cultural factors that in the last years have led many graffiti-writers to be exposed in galleries (often set up by other ex-writers), to manage with advertising agencies and to deal with the local authorities for projects of urban requalification, while not losing their connections with the more illegal side of graffiti-writing and making the urban space a sort of 'interface' between the under- and the 'overground' dimensions. With respect to the methodology, in addition to a set of qualitative tools (such as in depth interviews and participating observations), I used many visual materials (mainly photographs, but also archive materials and advertisements) for a number of purposes, like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- documenting the evolution of the various styles that take place in the graffiti world, especially focusing on the iconographic elements that, in the recent years, have made graffiti more intelligible even to people not qualified to judge in graffiti matters;</li> <li>- showing some patterns of cooperation between writers and cultural producers or intermediaries (for example marketing and advertising agencies) or municipal institutions;</li> <li>- documenting the multiple ways in which graffiti-writers modify their 'pieces' in order to meet the requirements of legal and 'institutional' contexts such as galleries and museums;</li> <li>- proving how graffiti-writers use photographic and visual material to promote themselves through personal websites that they often 'advertise' drawing their addresses close to the 'pieces' realized in the streets;</li> <li>- documenting how photographic material, once published, represents one of the possible ways in which writers can try to spread their works without adapting them to the conventions of art market.</li> </ul>	

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Paper Title	
<b>Collective Judgment and the Power of the Visual Record: An Inquiry into the Taser 'Incident' at the Vancouver International Airport</b>	
Description	
<p>The international airport, quintessential site of globalization, contains within its 'non-place' borders diverse and contradictory hopes, dreams, fears, worries, and possibilities, as people pass time, say tearful goodbyes, anticipate joyful reunions, pause anxiously at security checkpoints, and wonder what awaits them in new, and sometimes, promised, lands. The arrival of a Polish immigrant at the Vancouver International Airport on October 14, 2007, whose disoriented conduct provoked a call to 911, ended in his death at the hands of authorities and a highly publicized inquiry (January 2009-present) into the response of members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The multiple and by most accounts, <i>gratuitous</i>, deployment of Taser guns which culminated in the announcement of a "Code Red" by police, moments after this man could be seen writhing, and heard screaming, in pain on the floor of the airport, were remarkably 'captured' in a 10-minute bystander video. By chance, the Canadian traveler who was on the scene made his 'footage' widely availability to the public; it was played on the nightly news, stills from this video regularly appear in Canadian newspapers, and the video continues to be available for the cyber-linked world to view and remark upon. This paper analyzes this incident as a case study into the relationship between collective judgment and the (contested) interpretation of visual records, in a period increasingly influenced by the likelihood that confrontations in the public domain will be recorded on camera. Indeed, the bystander video appears in this case as <i>the dominant account</i> to which all other forms of accounting are required to speak; the implications of this are extensive. Drawing upon media representations of the event and transcriptions of interrogations from the public inquiry, I consider the multiple ways in which the bystander video has shaped the horizon of judgment concerning police force. Guided by theoretical analyzes of visual documentations of violence and pain, I also explore the broader cultural, political, and ethical implications surrounding <i>the status of the visual record</i> which this disturbing case brings to the fore.</p>	