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abstract The article offers an overview of the field of visual sociology. It examines the areas where visual sociology can provide an insightful perspective for the study of social reality and serves as an imaginative tool to work with a variety of research subjects. It outlines some specific methods for working with visual data and focuses on a few of the many fields where visual sociological methods can fruitfully be applied, such as the study of cities, public events and new media.

keywords events ♦ everyday life ♦ image ♦ new media ♦ spectacle ♦ urban

Introduction

One of the grounding ideas of visual sociology is that 'valid scientific insight in society can be acquired by observing, analyzing and theorizing its visual manifestations: behavior of people and material products of culture' (Pauwels, 2010: 546). Visual sociology aims to normalize the use of visual imagery as a valid and relevant type of data for sociological research (Nathansohn and Zuev, 2013a). One of the important postulates in sociological analyses is the consideration of images as data, and not merely as an illustration or embellishment of a sociological argument. Visual sociologists study images, and they study social reality through those images. As with other data, a single image, a sequence of images, and even a repository of images cannot serve as visual sociology arguments in themselves without employing sociological theory (thereby ensuring the sociological value of visual methods). Visual sociological analysis can also be presented without any images. Visual sociological approaches can even be used to analyse non-visual data, for example, when interviewing people on how they create, interpret and circulate images. In this case, visual sociologists analyse data related to how the social world is seen by subjects and not the specific images themselves.

Visual sociology has languished on the margins of acceptance for mainstream sociological journals and in mainstream sociology in general, despite its grow-

ing popularity. However, sociologists have increasingly come to recognize the value of visual methodologies (Sztompka, 2008), and the importance of iconic phenomena in contemporary culture (Alexander, 2010). Others have demonstrated interest in the importance of images and other visual data for micro-sociological research (Collins, 2004). Recently published major works in visual sociology have been dedicated to diverse social issues such as ethnic conflicts, perception of urban landscape, collective identities and gender (Nathansohn and Zuev, 2013b). Others have focused on particular methods such as participatory video used in different contexts (see Milne et al., 2012) and emphasize the need for integration of existing knowledge and expertise regarding the visual (Pauwels, 2015). Still others have focused on particular subjects such as global cities (Krase, 2012b), cinema (Sutherland and Feltey, 2013), or immigration (Batziou, 2011).

Collecting and analysing visual data: short overview of methods and approaches

Visual sociology is concerned with studying the seen as well as the unseen aspects of social reality with the use of tools that allow production, collection and

analysis of visual data. These tools include photo documentation, photo elicitation, participatory video and photography, data generated by the research subjects, as well as other classical methods such as content analysis, interviews and participant observation (Margolis and Pauwels, 2011). The visual data can also include three-dimensional data, such as objects and settings, about which sociologically relevant inferences can be made.

One of the most popular and most challenging techniques of collecting original data, which has been actively promoted and elaborated on by visual sociologists, is probably the photo-elicitation interview (Harper, 2002; Lapenta, 2011; Schwartz, 1989; Zuev, 2006). The photo-elicitation interview involves the use of images produced by the researcher or the research subjects to facilitate elicitation of information that without the use of images would not have been extracted. It can engage individual or group responses on different topics and it provides an equilibrated visual–oral research tool. As to photo-elicitation and the use of photographs used as data, the Colliers were pivotal, having stipulated:

If researchers are without reliable keys to photographic content, if they do not know what is positive responsible evidence and what is intangible and strictly impressionistic, anthropology will not be able to use photographs as data, and there will be no way of moving from raw photographic imagery to the synthesized statement. (Collier and Collier, 1986: 13)

Some recent sociological studies demonstrate the need for an integration of methods to equalize the relationship between researcher and researched by means of participatory visual data production (Anzoi and Mutti, 2013; Milne et al., 2012) and computer assisted visual methods such as PAKMAP. This is happening along with increasing ethical concerns in some national research contexts, where visual research is not permitted without undergoing complex review procedures prior to the study (see Wiles et al., 2012). This factor has been considered as a formidable obstacle to using certain methods of data collection practised by visual sociologists, but at the same time has forced creative solutions towards a more ethical research setting.

There is also other opposition to using visual data in visual sociology analysis. For instance, Emmison and Smith direct the visual sociological concern towards ‘what can be seen rather than what has been photographed’ (2007: 17). The authors argue that the features of the social world do not have to be materialized in order to be analysed, and contend that the necessity to provide visual images is not always required for the visual enquiry. While such

prominent advocates of visual sociology as Douglas Harper (1997) argue for a wider use of photographic images as the source of data, Emmison and Smith represent the strand favouring the use of living visual data (body, gazes, gestures, postures, displays, three-dimensional material objects). Thus, they contribute to the strand of qualitative sociological research that follows the tradition of analysis of non-reactive measures (Webb et al., 1966) or the use of visual data exemplified by Schwartz and Jacobs in their study on the ‘signs of prohibition’ (1979).

Theoretically, Erving Goffman’s conceptualizations on encounters, rituals, interaction order, behaviour in public places and gender displays have played an important role in establishing the modern visual sociological foundations and directing its analytical agenda. Goffman’s work on gender advertisements (1979) is not only a fundamental work on the analysis of visual media (advertising), but an important contribution to the analysis of social performance embedded in a particular social situation. Concepts such as ‘hyper-ritualization’ and framing allowed a more nuanced understanding of the advertising phenomenon. But the crucial work of Goffman, which is the most relevant for the visual analysis and studies of modern media and impression management, is *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where Goffman’s core analysis lies in the exploration of the relationship between performance and life. Dramaturgical analysis developed by Goffman offers a rich conceptual apparatus for studying the social structure of co-present and public interactions.

Ethnomethodological practices are similar to Goffmanian sociology and symbolic interactionism, whose objective is to understand the social ordering and the finer details of human conduct. Ethnomethodology, developed most notably by Harold Garfinkel, is one of the theoretical strands that has integrated visual data analysis into its framework and has been preoccupied with the practices of visualization and practices of seeing or rather the ‘looks of things’ among other topics. The visual dimension has been particularly important for ethnomethodologists, who are interested in the participant’s point of view as well as contextual particulars of a situation. Ethnomethodology is an approach particularly suited to observe and analyse the social practices as they naturally occur (Ball and Smith, 2011).

Useful insights for visual sociology can be gained from Bourdieu’s *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Bourdieu et al., 1990). Here the object of sociological interest is the photographic practice and practices of visualization. The subject of the book is not photographs but picture-taking as a social practice.

Bourdieu shows how the photographic practice of family photos may increase group solidarity, and suggests that people engaged in different types of photographic activities can delimit class boundaries.

One of the modern practices of picture-taking, and a representational innovation, the *selfie* has given rise to theoretical debates on sociability, changing aesthetics of self-presentation and empowerment, at the nexus of visual and urban culture (Manovich, 2016). The proliferation of various technological tools (digital camera, webcam, smartphone, selfie sticks, Go Pro camera, drone, Instagram) and the selfie phenomenon have raised questions not only of the banalization of visual culture but also female self-empowerment and political activism contributing to the studies of post-feminism (Murray, 2015).

Visual sociology has elaborated its theoretical framework along with developments in different theoretical streams in sociology, art theory and media studies, demonstrating its strong points of empirical application, which will be discussed in the following section.

What does visual sociology look at?

The variety of social issues that have been studied within visual sociology demonstrates the need to normalize visual analysis as an integral part of modern sociological research. Such normalization also means that to prove most efficient, methods of visual sociology should be utilized in conjunction with other methods of social enquiry. Such a conjuncture can allow more nuanced attention to the ambivalent nature of the photographic image, to the socio-historical contexts of the image, and to any commentary that may be provided by producers and consumers of the visual.

Many of the classic fields of enquiry in sociology have already been looked at through the lens of visual sociology: class, gender, nationalism and multiculturalism, ethno-racial relations, work and organizations, urbanism and family, to name a few.

Although visual sociology as a full-blown sociological specialty is a relative newcomer according to Prosser and Loxley (2008), some of the areas of sociology, such as urban sociology, have been 'visual' for a long time.

City life: the signs of culture and vernacular landscapes

From Georg Simmel (1924 [1908]), through Henri Lefebvre (1991), the visible has been central to urban analysis. Today, the interaction between the local and the global is shown in what John B Jackson

called 'vernacular landscapes' (1984), and are local markers of social change. Visual approaches can bridge various theoretical and applied disciplines that focus on city forms and functions. Most visual sociologists are what Borer would call 'Urban Culturalists who study the symbolic relationship between people and places and how people invest those places with meaning and value in order to make sense of their world' (2006: 180). In this perspective there are six distinct, yet related areas of research: (1) images and representations of the city; (2) urban community and civic culture; (3) place-based myths, narratives and collective memories; (4) sentiment and meaning of and for places; (5) urban identities and lifestyles; (6) interaction of places and practices. By simply removing the term 'urban', Borer's inventory covers most of what is done in visual sociology.

All the nominally 'urban' disciplines use visual approaches more or less explicitly whether through mapping, architectural rendering, photographic surveys, or land use and building surveys. In architecture and planning the visual has always been important in documentation, presentation, research and teaching. One of the best-known urbanists was William H Whyte, who used direct observation, still and movie cameras to study and describe behaviour in urban settings. His pioneering study of New York City's plazas resulted in a book and companion film, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces* (1980), and a model for visual approaches to the modern city.

Visual icons have long served important roles in urban research, such as Burgess's Concentric Zone diagram from 'The Growth of the City' (1925). Since then most urban ethnography has focused on what Burgess called the 'Zone of Transition', where one found roomers, hobos, addicts, poor folks, non/white minorities and lower class immigrants who lived in the Ghetto, Slum, Black Belt, Chinatown, Underworld, Vice and Little Sicily. The central organizing construct for urban studies has consistently been expressed in one form or another as visible space. Therefore, explaining how these real and imagined spaces are used, contested and transformed by different social groups has been a crucial goal.

For ecologists in the city, equilibrium is expressed through the interaction of human nature with geographical and spatial factors producing 'natural' areas. Political economists, on the contrary, see these same natural areas and ecological zones as the result of 'uneven development', and perhaps even cleverly planned cycles of decay and renewal. The question remains as to whether these disparate causes produce disparate visual effects such as those shown in the

brilliant documentary photographic work of Camilo Jose Vergara such as *The New American Ghetto* (1995).

At the most cerebral level of spatial semiotics, or symbolic ecology, James Dickinson sees in the landscape of the 'zone of social pathology' more than a simple process of dereliction – the view shared by both the Chicago School and Marxist geographers. Looking at ruined neighbourhoods, he posited that, 'These decaying zones become factories producing the ruins that will become the monuments of tomorrow. Here, then, are the liminal zones where new meanings and values are negotiated for old structures' (1996: 82).

Visual approaches are generally grounded in social semiotics that 'examines semiotic practices, specific to a culture and community, for the making of various kinds of texts and meanings in various situational contexts and contexts of culturally meaningful activity' (Lemke, 2011). Much of the visual in urban theory is framed by the idea of 'spectacle'. Guy Debord (1994) described the 'spectacle' as the totality of experience presented as reality by modern capitalism, such as that spread by advertising and mass media. However, spectacles are not images themselves but the social relations among the spectators mediated by them. For example, Ulf Hannerz discusses local culture 'as a spectacle in general, an alienating encounter of spatially and socioeconomically segregated groups. Tourism produces its own semiotics, where the street life of ethnic enclaves, or the natural activity of "third world people in first world locations," becomes a product for cultural consumption. The spectacle is produced from the difference between what the tourist encounters in the enclave and what she experiences at home. The totality of what she experiences as a spectator is itemized, taken out of context and packaged into products of cultural consumption. The Irish pub becomes a "typical Irish pub"' (Hannerz, 1996: 6).

Visual studies of urban life are greatly enhanced by the theory of symbolic interactionism. According to Lofland, interactionists have made significant contributions to knowledge about urban worlds by demonstrating how all sorts of people communicate through the built environment; for example, by the common practice of seeing settlements as symbols (Lofland, 2003: 938–939; see also Lofland, 1985, 1998). Individuals and groups also interact with each other through images, the meanings of which they have learned through socialization. Lofland also argued that 'the city, because of its size, is the locus of a peculiar social situation; the people found within its boundaries at any given moment know nothing personally about the vast majority of others with whom they share this space'. She added that, 'city life

was made possible by an "ordering" of the urban populace in terms of appearance and spatial location such that those within the city could know a great deal about one another by simply looking' (Lofland, 1985: 22).

The ethnic and other kinds of vernacular landscapes are crucial, yet often ignored parts of that urban text. Sharon Zukin noted that the emphasis and interest of many urbanists has been on the geographic battles over access and representations of the urban centre. In that regard she wrote, 'Visual artifacts of material culture and political economy thus reinforce – or comment on – social structure. By making social rules "legible" they represent the city' (Zukin, 1996: 44). As a visible sign of decline, for example, Zukin offered that, 'In the long run vacant and undervalued space is bound to recede into the vernacular landscapes of the powerless and replaced by a new landscape of power' (p. 49).

David Harvey (1989) extensively discussed Henri Lefebvre's 'Spatial Practices' to note that those with the power to command and produce space can also reproduce and enhance their own power. It is within the boundaries created by these practices that the local lives of ordinary urban dwellers take place. In a related vein, Pierre Bourdieu noted that 'the most successful ideological effects are those which have no words, and ask no more than complicitous silence'. Therefore we can say that the production of symbolic capital serves ideological functions, because the mechanisms through which it contributes 'to the reproduction of the established order and to the perpetuation of domination remain hidden' (Bourdieu, 1977: 188; see also King, 1996: 112–136). For a visual sociologist, many of these otherwise 'hidden' reproductions *cum* re-presentations of local social life are in rather 'plain view'. Bourdieu's notion of the 'habitus' or practices that produce, in the present case, visible regularities, is also helpful in regard to seeing the effects of the powerful (1977: 72–95). For Lefebvre the visual was central to producing social space of any scale: 'A further important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind; the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them. The predominance of visualization (more important than "spectacularization", which is in any case subsumed by it) serves to conceal repetitiveness. People look, and take sight, take seeing, for life itself. We build on the basis of papers and plans. We buy on the basis of images' (Lefebvre, 1991: 75–76).

Representations of the city, despite their selective vision, are necessary for constructing a multidimensional analysis of urbanity, where conflicting and hybrid representations coexist (Shields, 1996). City

space, representations of cities and urban imaginaries are central to visual sociology, as it provides a means to show the modern urban processes: conflicts, flows, (im)mobilities, decay, sprawl.

The visual language of numerous blogs, books, anthologies and news sources (Millington, 2013) builds a complex ecology of a modern city (such as Detroit) that has moved from a stage of industrially backed urban growth to a standstill causing large social recomposition and decline. The language that depicts the city has been surprisingly homogeneous – with ‘ruin photography’ being repetitive as the photographers visualized the same sites in a similar way (Millington, 2013). The images of Detroit posted and discussed in blogs become deeply embedded in the established conventions of Detroit’s visual language industry. The blogs and articles take us on ‘virtual ruination tours’ (Millington, 2013: 289), while over and over reproducing the most used citations of the ruined city: Michigan Central Station, Packard Plant. These visual documentation methods represent the set of issues that arise about complex urban problems, suggesting that the city’s visual language helps define its future survival. Detroit in 2030 is depicted as a crime-ridden, lawless megapolis in *Robocop*, where the social problems of injustice and corruption are solved by a cyborg.

Visual representations of the city, as well as the narrative of decay, danger and moral degradation, allow us to evaluate the city’s representation for the multiple publics in the global information environment – the presentation comprised of a galaxy of images, comments, impressions and ideological frames that produces a ‘public screen’ (Sheller and Urry, 2003). Everyone with access to global media or the web can participate in a narrative reproduction related to a particular geographic location. What is private for the inhabitants of Detroit becomes available for the wider public view and discussion.

Visual methods are important for grasping the ‘fleeting’ and dispersed borders of the cities, which are constantly transforming: the borders between communities, the actual boundaries between the city and periphery, frontiers between its districts. The processuality affects our individual relation with the city and the memories of it, which constitute an important part of the urban discourse, when they are publicly shared. How cities are associated through their image in our memory, the linguistic equipment of the city that allows us to remember these cities (memories) – cities are recollections.

Michel de Certeau’s (1985) metaphor of looking at the city from the top of the Twin Towers helps us to understand it: we must go ‘down’ to where ‘the city’s common practitioners dwell’. For him, the act of walking creates the city, and as argued by Krase

(2012a) and Shortell and Brown (2014), simple walks and assembling visual inventories help excavate the deep urban archaeology of the multiple strata of places and spaces. These can be different architectural styles that are associated with certain political regimes, or they can be decorations and design features, as well as slogans or other visible objects which materialize the discursive network of the city.

While city spaces may provide the best venues for visual sociologists, public events, including celebrations, mega-events and protest events, offer a chance to study the micro-interactions of participants and ritualized behaviour in conjunction with contextually activated emotions and dynamics of collective effervescence. The city itself is a stage, where one can differentiate several settings for enactment, practical interaction and material and signatory interconnections.

Events: contexts for emotional interactions

Standard social scientific methods are not perfectly adapted to the analysis of events as a phenomenon with complex interactions, actors and meanings. As Law and Urry (2004) suggested, social scientists have yet to develop methods that resonate well with important reality enactments. The multiple sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic elements of events elude traditional social scientific methods of enquiry. In visual anthropology, cinematographic language in particular has allowed us to delve into fields that have previously escaped academic research: emotions and feelings, relativity of behaviour and values, cultural meanings of body, and cultural forms of expression, among others (Piault et al., 2015). Photography, the most democratized and accessible visual practice, enables researchers to understand the politics around the images by viewing the photographs as relational, social objects, and understanding what the photographers and subjects desired from the photos (Piault et al., 2015).

A variety of events can be approached and studied through the application of visual methods, including the fine-grained visual analysis of micro-interactions or interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004) and various ceremonial events or rituals that also comprise festive events (religious and secular festivals) (Zuev, 2016). Depending on the attention of the media, an insignificant happening can become a media event and, at this juncture, it is the responsibility of the visual sociologist to intervene and reveal the network of meanings attached to such an event.

Mega-events, such as the Olympic Games, expos and Football World Cups, are rather ambiguous public events as they celebrate the host nation as

much as they celebrate internationalism and universal human spirit in sports competition. Additionally, they are displays of sociability (Roche, 2000); however, they can also show breaches of contract between states. Two such cases were the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, boycotted by athletes from 65 states, and in 2014 the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, when some world leaders boycotted the opening ceremony of the Games 'to undercut the nationalistic glory' of the ceremony (*The New York Times*, 2014). These examples demonstrate that mega-events are not necessarily stages for the display of universal human unity, but instead a convenient platform for protest. Mega-events, through series of set ceremonies and rituals (such as the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics), create a performative discourse of national identity (Chen et al., 2012; Hogan, 2003; Puijk, 2000) and national sentiment (pride or shame) (Traganou, 2010). The Olympic Games, in particular, become paramount representations of nation, where patriotism is broadcast by means of the opening and closing ceremonies (MacAloon, 1984). The contrasting media representations of the events and the visual politics of mega-event coverage allow a vantage point for examining the deep political divides and tensions between different regional and international entities.

The Olympic Games, as much as festivals or carnivals, are large commercial ventures and tourist commodities, and thus, are subject to control, carefully planned public relations, advertising displays and marketing (Waitt, 1999), as they ultimately serve to function as vehicles for national image construction (Alekseyeva, 2014). To a great extent, the advertising and promotion of an event contribute to a heightened sense of emotions (Mock, 2012) and amplify visual political struggle. For instance, promotional images used for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi pictured male and female figures that were likened to (and thus criticized for) being representative of the mythical Aryan race, used by Leni Riefenstahl (1935) in the heroic visual narrative of the Berlin Olympics in *The Triumph of the Will* (Parfitt, 2011). The event and its visual surroundings became a target for political attacks giving the global media the power to interpret the event to suit their broadcasts. And subsequently, the coverage of the event itself, the framing, the visual narratives and even the photos of the participants used for the news stories made political statements focusing on criticism of the Russian political elite, rather than the spectacle of the event itself (Gibson, 2014).

Apart from the politically-grounded, selective focus on the mega-events, media may selectively dramatize particular sports or disciplines in them. For instance, Whannel (2006) used film-analysis to

show mythologization of sport events. Among these events, the one-mile run offers particularly good material for drama as it is neither too long (e.g. like the marathon), nor too short (e.g. the 100 yards race); the story is easy to understand, and the tactics simple enough to perceive and comprehend. Whannel (2006) shows that athletic events have a powerful hermeneutic structure with strong dramatic potential that is demonstrated through iconic narrative.

Photojournalistic accounts also remain useful visual data for studying events. One of the advantages of using photojournalistic accounts is their neutrality, in that they do not reflect the position of the researcher or the respondent. It is also possible to study an image's impact through content analysis of the viewers' comments (if this feature is enabled online). This is particularly important when studying the impact of videos on YouTube. At times, photographs produced during significant events become iconic and are later used as murals, graffiti and/or as propaganda material. Such images may become decontextualized, with the link to the original event becoming obscure. However, it is also true that some events become associated with a particular photo that was produced by a photojournalist. One single moment captured by a photojournalist is transformed into an event as it becomes an iconic image for something larger. For example, a photo of a self-immolating monk by Malcolm Browne (1963) has become a staple photo of silent anti-war protest. 'Ulster's boy petrol-bomber' by Clive Limpkin (1969) became a symbol for violent resistance and identity politics. The death of a protester in Genoa captured by Dylan Martinez (2001) during an antiglobalization protest became a metonym of the antiglobalization movement (Perlmutter and Wagner, 2001).

To summarize, public events, festivals and spectacles offer a great source of empirical data for a visual sociologist. The knowledge and explanation of the context of the event, its history and symbolic politics are crucial in making sense of the visual, including images, hand-woven tapestries, elements of graphic design, drawings, graffiti or objects, representing events.

New media: activism and visual politics

Visual sociology is becoming extremely relevant in such fields of enquiry as social movement studies (Doerr et al., 2013), including practices of resistance (Adams, 2013), environmental justice and activism (Askanius and Uldam, 2014; DeLuca, 1999), the use of new media by radical (Zuev, 2011) and militant activist groups (Vergani and Zuev, 2011) and visual activism (see also *Current Sociology*, 2016; *Journal of*

Visual Culture, 2016). The Internet provides visual sociologists with massive opportunities as increasingly more people share their private photos and videos over social networking sites (SNS). However, visual offerings are still in the shadow of oral narratives in social media studies. Researchers are engaged with the material and structural affordances of social media platforms and not the properties of the visual on these platforms (Meese et al., 2015). Some researchers, however, have started to use visual analysis of online data in studies of urban environment and urban socio-spatial transformation. For instance, Lizama's (2016) study raised the issues of the materiality and aesthetic 'looks' of neoliberalism and the public participation in its production through analysis of Instagram photos.

Social networking sites and video and photo-sharing platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram (Smith and Sanderson, 2015), Vine, Snapchat, Pinterest, Meerkat and Periscope, have become an integral part of the modern visual culture. But they rarely get the proper attention of visual sociologists, or sociologists who would attend to the implied politics of this new visibility, and the new channels and processes affording this visibility (leaked snapshots, mobile videos). The social media shape the processes of data use, sharing practices, identity formation, self-presentation and on the whole, visual communication and visual consumption (Zuev, 2015). YouTube is one of the most popular video-sharing web platforms; it provides marginal social groups including terrorist, anti-government and other radical organizations and networks with a free communication outlet. YouTube has been particularly targeted by radical militant organizations all over the world (Andre, 2012; Vergani and Zuev, 2015) as a channel for propagating radical ideologies and recruiting youth into their movements. In particular, there has been great interest in studies of radical organizations and how they communicate their messages visually. The Internet has provided multiple platforms for impression management, self-presentation, manipulation and visual data storage.

The modern visual sphere is extensively 'shared', more publicly available, user-generated and uncensored. The fundamental relationship between self and society is questioned in a number of studies on social networks where visual data are 'overshared'. In his study, Ben Agger (2012) suggests the perspective of *oversharing* and excess of image data in the modern presentation of self, and an emerging new regime of privacy and surveillance.

One of the important aspects of modern social life is not only how we observe and make a record of the visible and note the invisible, but also how our

presence and movements are being observed by the agents of power in the city, from the sky and at the borders. We are not only being seen and recorded continuously via media presence and surveillance technology, but, potentially, we can be recorded and gazed at any time by the mobile eyes – surveillance airplanes, drones and satellites. Drones have become everyday objects, not only used by the military, but by tourists, by activists and by radical militants as well as news media (Zuev and Bratchford, 2017). How can the boundaries of the seeable and watchable be established? Visual sociology has always attempted to address the issues beyond the picture and beyond the frame. The new practices of surveillance will engender new practices and geographies of invisibility, and the new regimes of gaze will engender new techniques of resisting the gaze. The dynamic struggle between visibility and remaining beyond the scope of the seeing eye will define the future enquiry of visual sociology.

Future agenda for visual sociologists

Real people and places have long been the most appealing subjects for visual sociologists, who wished to observe and record for themselves the near and distant, static and changing, social realities. The expanding contemporary galaxy of images available on social networking sites invites and perhaps demands the sociological investigation of large collections of visual data, generated by multiple individuals, publics, communities and channels. This begs for more focused study of the practices and sociality of these individuals, communities and publics. One of the major methodological questions today is whether sociologists interested in making sense of large visual datasets will be able to communicate with sociologists interested in singularity, in capturing and focusing on one moment, rather than quantification of the expanding galaxy. Will the mixed methods approach in visual sociology advance and succeed? Will sociologists find a balance between the analysis of metadata and descriptives on one side and the diversity of the optical codes, scopic regimes and ideology of gender displays on the other?

The social issues of the modern world are increasingly communicated visually, and some of the iconic images of today are the ones that best capture the inner concerns of society with infringements upon our freedom, safety, health, peace, justice and natural balance. These images change our way of seeing our presence in this world, that makes us pause and grasp for understanding regardless of our proximity to or distance from the origin of the image itself. Powerful images connect us as sociologists and

human beings across any boundaries. These iconic images will remain the essence of visual analysis and the analysis of social reality behind them. A huge amount of work has been done that engages with the use and the analysis of contemporary media-based social practices; they are not branded by the authors as visual sociology but can be identified by visual sociologists as such: see for instance a study on the role of urban surveillance in the night-time economy (Brands et al., 2016), the new aesthetic discourse regarding new media (Sterling, 2012), media aesthetics (Hausken, 2014, 2015) and the social media-powered shopping practices of transnational Chinese middle-class women (Zhang, 2017), or the materiality of the visual (Bruno, 2014). All these studies focus on the processes directly related to viewing, seeing, recording or otherwise interacting with the visual and in the 'visual sphere' (Nathansohn and Zuev, 2013b) as the context of the ongoing scholarly interrogation.

Since their origins in anthropology and sociology, visual approaches became ubiquitous in the social sciences. Also, given the 'theoretic turn' towards the acceptance of qualitative methods and analyses, photography, film and video are increasingly incorporated as research tools and as sources of data. The challenge is in adapting to rapidly evolving social and cultural scenes enriched by visual and especially digital, ways of communicating and interacting. The rapid development of information technology is paralleled by a tremendous increase in the use of visual forms of communication. The digital storage and transmission of images, the availability of video technology and its digital accessibility, the dissemination of visual surveillance technologies or the transformation from textual to visual forms of communication, turn visualizations in various forms into an integral part of contemporary culture and everyday life (Knoblauch et al., 2008).

As already noted, having demonstrated their usefulness, visual approaches have been well-received in urban research. The editors of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* note that cities are in effect screens for reading 'layers of textual and image-based information'. Consequently:

IJURR now publishes photographs, maps and graphics, but we are a long way from realizing the potential imagery unleashed by the digital revolution. We are facing the challenge of the digital revolution and its apparent opportunities with a broad range of editorial strategies ranging from representation inside and outside the printed journal (e.g. through our emerging website), through more engagement with visualization as a problematic of urban research, and through recognition of the role architecture, design

and style play in the urban fabric of the twenty-first-century city. (Seekings and Kell, 2009: iv)

The practices of producing and disseminating images are rapidly and constantly changing. Everyday practices that constitute our social and visual existence will always be a crucial field of enquiry in visual sociology. It will be essential for visual sociologists to observe the evolution of the practices of self-presentation and visualization and (re)invent tools for analysis of images produced and circulated by mobile devices, shared via different applications and platforms. The agenda of visual sociology is not limited to the analysis of 2D images or even the proliferating new ways of disseminating images in cyberspace. It engages with critical analysis of social change and shifts in social reality, by focusing on processes that are visible and invisible in infrastructure, urban transformation, inequalities, design as well as various forms of visual and digital co-production and image-sharing: dream-sharing, drawings, graffiti collectives, surveillance, drone-based video and photo production and many others.

Visual sociologists are working on providing techniques and methods to deal with visible and invisible sides of human existence, and the sides that perhaps are not yet knowable and inaccessible. New generations of visual sociologists referring to the pioneering works of visual scientists who worked primarily with photographs and videos, two-dimensional images and media representations, will be increasingly addressing the interfaces between new media technology, materiality, politics and new regimes of visibility.

Annotated further reading

Goffman E (1979) *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper and Row.

A classic work by Erving Goffman, where he describes how femininity and masculinity are displayed within Western media. An important read for those who are interested in gender stereotyping in visual media.

Krase J (2012) *Seeing Cities Change: Local Culture and Class*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Seeing Cities Change demonstrates the utility of a visual approach and the study of ordinary streetscapes to document and analyse how the built environment reflects the changing cultural and class identities of neighbourhood residents. Bringing together a variety of sources from scholarly and mass media, it demonstrates how these changes relate to issues of local and national identities and multiculturalism. It presents studies of various cities on both sides of the Atlantic to show how global forces and the competition between urban residents

in 'contested terrains' are changing the face of cities around the globe.

- Margolis E and Pauwels L (eds) (2011) *The Sage Handbook of Visual Research*. Los Angeles: Sage. This handbook covers in depth the breadth and scope of the field. It discusses both historical and current studies, as well as pointing towards future research possibilities. It illustrates 'cutting edge' as well as long-standing and recognized practices. Contributors to the book are from diverse backgrounds and its 42 chapters each describe a methodology or analytical framework, its strengths and limitations, possible fields of application and practical guidelines on how to apply the method or technique.
- Nathansohn R and Zuev D (eds) (2013) *Sociology of the Visual Sphere*. New York: Routledge. This collection of original articles deals with two intertwined general questions: what is the visual sphere, and what are the means by which we can study it sociologically? These questions serve as the logic for dividing the book into two sections, the first ('Visualizing the Social, Sociologizing the Visual') focuses on the meanings of the visual sphere, and the second ('New Methodologies for Sociological Investigations of the Visual') explores various sociological research methods to get a better understanding of the visual sphere.
- Pink S (2013) *Doing Visual Ethnography*, 3rd edn. London: Sage. *Doing Visual Ethnography* has been essential reading for those engaged in ethnographic and visual research. This edition includes chapters on web-based practices for visual ethnography and the issues surrounding the representation, interpretation and authoring of knowledge with the rise of digital media. It provides a foundation for thinking about visual ethnography and introduces the practical and theoretical issues relating to the visual and digital technologies used in the field.
- Prosser J (ed.) (1998) *Image-based Research*. London: Falmer. This was the first volume dedicated to exploring visual approaches to qualitative research and continues to be an invaluable sourcebook for researchers in many fields. The book covers a broad scope, including theory and the research process; and provides practical examples of how image-based research is applied in the field. It discusses use of images in child abuse investigation; exploring children's drawings in health education; cartoons; the media and teachers.
- Warren CAB and Karner TX (2014) *Discovering Qualitative Methods: Ethnography, Interviews, Documents, and Images*. New York: Oxford University Press. *Discovering Qualitative Methods* establishes the theoretical underpinnings and applications of qualitative research by offering a comprehensive coverage that includes the major types of qualitative analysis: field research or ethnography, interviews, documents, and

images. Of special value is the discussion of the historical background and evolution of research practices.

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résumé L'article propose une vue d'ensemble du champ de la sociologie visuelle. Il donne un aperçu des domaines où la sociologie visuelle fournit une perspective autonome pour l'étude de la réalité sociale et s'impose comme un outil inventif pour aborder une grande variété de sujets de recherche. Il décrit certaines méthodes spécifiques de travail à partir des données visuelles et se concentre sur quelques-uns des nombreux domaines où les méthodes de la sociologie visuelle peuvent être appliquées avec succès, comme l'étude des villes, des événements publics et des nouveaux médias.

mots-clés événements ♦ image ♦ nouveaux médias ♦ spectacle ♦ urbain ♦ vie quotidienne

resumen El artículo presenta una visión general del campo de la sociología visual. En este marco, brinda un panorama general de todas las áreas en donde la sociología visual proporciona una perspectiva auto-suficiente para el estudio de la realidad social y se presenta como una herramienta imaginativa para trabajar una amplia variedad de temas de investigación. El trabajo describe algunos métodos específicos para analizar datos visuales y describe cómo los métodos sociológicos visuales pueden aplicarse, con éxito, al estudio de ciudades, eventos públicos y nuevos medios de comunicación.

palabras clave espectáculo ♦ eventos ♦ imagen ♦ nuevos medios ♦ urbano ♦ vida diaria