Editorial
Visual Methodologies

Alexa Athelstan and Rosemary Deller

'**Visual Methodologies**', the May 2013 edition of the Graduate Journal of Social Science, explores the new pathways being carved out by postgraduate researchers and early career academics for the deployment of visual methodologies in the social sciences. This edition is partly inspired by previous collections on visual methodologies, particularly Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman's (2004) *Picturing the Social Landscape: Visual Methods and the Sociological Imagination* and Gregory C. Stanczak's (2007) *Visual Research Methods: Images, Society and Representation.* It also responds to specific innovative discussions and implementations of visual methodologies in social research, for example David Gauntlett's (2007) *Creative Explorations: The Social Meaning of Creativity, From DIY And Knitting To YouTube And Web 2.0*, and the 'queer feminist methodology' of 'making images with (speaking) subjects rather than taking images from passive or silenced objects' presented in Del LaGrace Volcano and Ulrika Dahl's

(2008, 14) *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities.* This GJSS edition on *Visual Methodologies* seeks to contribute to this fast expanding field of enquiry by drawing particular attention to the theoretical contributions made to the social sciences through the use of visual methods, as well as the pragmatics and epistemological reasoning behind their deployment to investigate various intricate facets of social life.

Drawing on John Berger's (1977, 7) argument that 'Seeing comes before words and establishes our place in the surrounding world,' Knowles and Sweetman (2004, 1) highlight how as 'sighted human beings', we 'navigate the social world visually.' This underlines a 'fundamental connection between visualization and the organization of human existence, of being in the world' (Berger 1977, 7). Yet, while visual methodologies have always been an integral tool in the behavioural sciences, as well as being popularly used in anthropology, it is only since the 1990s that the use of visual methods has

become widespread across the social sciences. Here, they have been utilised to engender new knowledge, new ways of thinking about topics, and of understanding the life worlds, experiences and perspectives of our research participants (Stanczak 2007; Knowles & Sweetman 2004). Such an approach recognises, as Knowles and Sweetman (2004, 2) argue, that the subjects and locations of research 'demand visual representation as researchers struggle with the methodological means of imparting what they' and, indeed, what participants experience and *see* in more than words.' However, as Sarah Pink (2001) argues, it is not simply enough to fit images into existing methodologies; instead we must develop new – visually specific – methodologies for deploying this analytic tool and source of data, so that these may open up new ways of conceptualising the social. With rapid developments in digital technologies and increasing popular access to and use of these technologies by people in their everyday lives, visual methodologies today is a fast growing and dynamic field.

The benefits of using visual methodologies have been thoroughly explored by social scientists. For example, Suki Ali (2004) highlights how 'we live in a society where visual images have proliferated and our ways of seeing and our experiences of and responses to visual spectacles are central to our under-

standing of who we are and where we belong' (Ali 2004, 284). The use of visual methods can therefore serve to 'visualize' the 'intangible dimensions of human activity' (Whincup 2004, 79). Furthermore, as Pink argues, because our conversations are 'filled with verbal references to images' and the use of words alone simply 'cannot express all of the elements of the visual in which we are interested,' it therefore makes sense to use visual methods to represent those aspects of the topics that we research that might otherwise be referred to and represented through abstract words (in Mason 2002, 105, 107). In terms of visual anthropologies and the integration of images into ethnographies, John Collier and Malcolm Collier (1986) highlight how images can aid researchers in recording, remembering and rendering the research field visibly accessible to others, albeit in a way that is always already partial, mediated and constructed.

Another good reason for using visual methods, according to Jeffrey Samuels (2007), is that images in conjunction with interviews, for example, can yield far richer data than word-only interviews. Indeed, often only a few prompts are needed, when working with visual materials in interviews, to elicit highly detailed answers. Visual methods can therefore require very little intervention from the researcher. This furthermore encourages participants to take a leading role in directing the

research focus and process. This argument is supported by David Byrne and Aidan Doyle (2004, 175, 177), who found that 'images seemed to enable words' in the context of their photo elicitation interviews, since images can aid participants in expressing 'complex understandings' concerning their perspectives and experiences. By minimising the influence of the researcher in the production of visual images and the interviewing process and by focusing on the images and interpretations of participants, Samuels (2007) argues that primacy is given to participants. This 'provides a greater opportunity for research subjects to create their own sense of meaning and disclose it to the researcher' (Samuels 2007, 199). The use of visual methods can also challenge the researcher by breaking their frames of reference and focusing attention on what is important to the participant, including issues that may not have occurred to the researcher (Samuels 2007, 204). Therefore, the use of visual methods, when used responsibly, ethically and with reflexive critical awareness, can grant our participants 'an increased voice and a greater authority to interpret their own personal experiences' (Samuels 2007, 213). Furthermore, as Stanczak (2007, 13) argues, the use of images in research designs and practice can also effectively create a space for the unexpected, because images can 'open up internal worlds and interpretations of

our participants regarding issues that we might not otherwise think to probe.' In this way, 'employing images in our methodologies often reveals surprising new knowledge that we as scholars, students, and researchers may not have recognized through conventional means' (Stanczak 2007, 8).

With regards to issues of building rapport between researchers and their participants, visual methodologies have been praised as largely encouraging participants to feel more comfortable about the research process, by 'deepening rapport,' which can help to 'unlock what otherwise might be closed off' (Stanczak 2007, 12). To draw on Collier's metaphor, images may thus be used 'as a "can opener" for deeper reflection and discussion within the interview process (in Stanczak 2007, 15). Furthermore, as Gauntlett (2007) notes, participant-led auto elicitation visual materials, in combination with image elicitation interviews in particular, can give participants *time* to reflect, which gives participants greater *control* over their self-representation and enables them to present more thorough, considered and complete answers to interview questions. Thus, the use of visual materials can encourage 'participants to become creatively involved in the research' (Seale 2004, 295). According to Stanczak (2007, 15) the use of images in interviews therefore 'brings the "subject" into the research process as an inter-

preter or even an active collaborator rather than as a passive object of study.' However, significant care does need to be taken not only with the implementation of visual methods, but also with the interpretation of visual materials. Considering the polyvocal nature of images, Elizabeth Chaplin, drawing on Victor Burgin (1986), highlights that 'photographs do not speak for themselves'; rather 'it is words which give meaning to images' (in Knowles and Sweetman 2004, 37). Furthermore, since 'images gain significance through the way that participants engage and interpret them' (Stanczak 2007, 12), it is typically preferable for images employed by critical and reflexive social scientists to be analysed in context of interpretations present in the words of our research participants. However, there are, of course, also significant limitations to the deployment of visual methods. Indeed, as Stanczak (2007, 13) aptly articulates: 'Whereas certain doors may be open, others may be closed. Whereas some issues may be tapped by images, others may go unnoticed. The camera may invoke rapport in one situation and shut it down in another.' These limitations include photography's participation in histories of control and surveillance (Stanczak 2007; Knowles and Sweetman 2004) – which can close down rapport in certain circumstances as quickly as it can open it up in others – as well as ethical issues surrounding anonymisation and consent. There are also practical issues like the often significant costs and skills required for using certain technologies and storing visual materials.

With this in mind, this edition seeks to ask the following questions: *why* and *how* do we effectively integrate visual methodologies into our research agendas and designs, epistemological approaches and methodological toolbox to stimulate and inform our approaches to investigating the social? What practical, epistemological and theoretical questions or problems do the use of visual methodologies raise? How do we tailor different mediums of visual methodologies, such as photographic images, maps, collages, video diaries or the observation and analysis of physical landscapes and objects, to investigate and theorise topics that are of interest to social scientists? The articles published in this edition focus on issues such as the relationship between words and images, ways of interpreting and analysing visual data, reflections on the ethics and power relations involved in deploying visual methods, as well as to what extent visual methodologies can help or hinder attempts at engendering inclusivity and accessibility. All the authors presented in this edition, writing from various stages in their research, learning and life trajectories, have strived to engage with visual methodologies in a strongly situated and reflexive fashion (Harding 2001;

Mason 2002), by implementing and discussing their methodologies with intersectional sensitivity and an engaged awareness of their own positionalities and the positionalities of their participants. Individually and collectively, they explore a diverse variety of different mediums of visual methodologies, including participatory auto-driven photo and graphic elicitation in conjunction with focus groups, interviews or questionnaires, photo essays, postcards and written responses to images selected by researchers, amongst others. Readers will find a variety of topics explored in this edition, as these are explored through and impact on our use of visual methodologies: social inclusion and marginalisation; place affiliation, mobility and belonging; experiences, memories and affective relations to various different geographical and domestic spaces; and power, identity and intersecting positionalities.

To commence this edition, **Natalie Robinson** explores the use of visual methodologies as a means of negotiating questions of social inclusion and exclusion in her article *Picturing Social Inclusion: Photography and Identity in Downtown Eastside Vancouver.* Robinson explores the relationship between photography and identity by focusing on the annual 'Hope in the Shadows' photography contest held in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). Through an analysis of her

field-based research, Robinson explores how individuals in the DTES have used photography to negotiate self and community identity. Robinson discusses how participatory visual methods could enable socially excluded individuals to claim recognition and an affirmative social presence, thereby opening up multiple avenues to social action.

These themes of belonging, identity and inclusion are extended by a short essay from **Stine Thidemann Faber, Karina Torp Møller** and **Helene Pristed Nielsen**. In their paper, ***Applying Visual Methods in the Study of Place Affiliation, Mobility and Belonging,*** Thidemann Faber, Torp Møller and Pristed Nielsen discuss the relationship between geographic mobility and 'everyday belonging' for subjects who are mobile across borders. In this empirical study of place perceptions among 'newcomers' (men and women who have moved to North Denmark within the last two-and-a-half years), Thidemann Faber, Torp Møller and Pristed Nielsen handed out cameras to participants in the region as part of a method they call volunteer-employed photography (VEP). By asking participants to photograph elements of their everyday life that either made them feel 'at home' or like 'a newcomer' in the region, this study aims to explore the correlation between belonging in everyday life and 'the local', on the one hand, and belonging in national and transnational communities on the other.

This question of how we connect with and perceive the landscape around us as differently positioned subjects is further explored by **Zoë K. Millman** in her essay *Photographic Postcards as Research Tools: The 'Postcards from the Cut' Study*. In order to elicit and record written responses to the regenerated central canal landscape in Birmingham, United Kingdom, Millman deployed an innovative visual method based upon participants responding to a photographic postcard featuring an instruction and six images of the canal landscape arranged in a grid format. Millman's analysis of the returned narratives not only highlights the multiple meanings and preferences that converge on the Birmingham canalscape; moreover, Millman suggests that this visual method is an effective means for researchers to communicate with participants remotely, thereby expanding the scope of studies into landscape perception.

While Millman explores how individuals relate to the public landscape of the regenerated Birmingham canal, **Lindsey Jayne McCarthy** focuses on the meanings that circulate around the notion of 'home.' In her article *'It's Coming From the Heart': Exploring a Student's Meanings of 'Home' Using Participatory Visual Methodologies*, McCarthy reflects on her pilot study deploying auto-photography and photo elicitation to examine how students living away from the family home come to construct, re-iterate and re-negotiate the notion of 'home'. Suggesting that 'home' can be more of an aspiration or fluid set of meanings rather than a fixed space, McCarthy's study invites us to reflect on how the student home is experienced beyond the bricks and mortar of the house.

Liz Bridger also utilises visual methods to navigate the meanings that attach to 'home' in her essay, *Seeing and Telling Households: A Case for Photo Elicitation and Graphic Elicitation in Qualitative Research*. In this paper, Bridger reflects upon her pilot study that utilises graphic and photo elicitation to explore the 'couple-shared household' – a growing social phenomenon in which young adult couples increasingly share a house with other young adults. Bridger addresses her use of photographs and three diagrammatic activities – relationship maps, timelines and household maps – to demonstrate the suitability of these methods for researching how relationality, temporality and spatiality are negotiated in the living arrangements of young adults.

As Bridger reflects upon the growing significance of the 'young adult' as a figure in contemporary society, **Joanne Hill's** paper argues that visual methodologies – and the social sciences in general – have not always been successful in recognising young people as social actors capable of constructing and negotiating their selves and their

social worlds. In her article ***Using Participatory and Visual Methods to Address Power and Identity in Research with Young People***, Hill seeks to explore young people's low or decreasing participation in physical education (PE) and sport. Aware that a lack of intersectional research in this area has often marginalised the experience of minority ethnic young people, Hill worked with a group of 13–14 year old British Asian students in an urban secondary school in the East Midlands. By using a multiple-methods approach that includes participant observation, researcher- and participant-produced photographs and group interviews, Hill reflects on how questions of embodiment and the effect of bodily norms shapes young people's participation in physical education.

Hill's attentiveness to recognising young people as social actors without simultaneously perpetuating norms surrounding social identity and inclusion is shared by **Dai O'Brien**. In his paper ***Visual Research with Young d/Deaf People – An Investigation of the Transitional Experiences of d/Deaf Young People from Mainstream Schools using Auto-Driven Photo-elicitation Interviews***, O'Brien discusses his use of auto-driven photo elicitation interviews to examine the experiences of transition into adulthood for eight young d/Deaf people from the South West of England. He suggests that visual methods can be an important

tool for equalising power imbalances caused by linguistic difference.

While the articles above feature authors frequently examining their relations with research participants, **Ruben Demasure** reflects on his own photographic practice in his review of the Urban Photography Summer School, held at Goldsmiths, University of London. In his review essay ***The Urban Photography Summer School at Goldsmiths, University of London: A Discussion and Photo Essay on Urban Rhythm***, Demasure identifies two central questions raised by the event: namely, the aesthetic and research value of photography, and the relationship between text and image. He then offers a photo essay that analyses his own street photography, which observes performativity and human behaviour as it is structured by or opposed to the rhythms that create a city.

The book review section of this GJSS edition on *Visual Methodologies*, edited by our dedicated **Book Review Editor Melissa Kelly**, fruitfully extends the thematic, epistemological and methodological foci of the articles by highlighting and critically discussing further innovative approaches to visual methodologies. Focusing on the analysis and interpretation of visual materials, **Gillian Rose's (2012)** ***Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials (Third edition),*** reviewed by **Chiara**

Valli, covers such interpretive methods as compositional interpretation, content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis and visuality, discourse analysis, ethnographic audience studies, photo documentation, elicitation and essays. According to Valli, Rose's text 'embraces two broad research fields concerned with visuality, which are rarely in dialogue': namely, the social science deployment of visual methods in research designs, and the traditions of visual cultural studies in which researchers analyse found visual materials. Valli positions *Visual Methodologies* as 'an excellent introduction to the complex and developing field of visual analysis', which furthermore addresses practical and theoretical tools for engaging critically with visual materials.

A truly innovative visual method is presented through **Steve Smith's** review of **Nick Papadimitriou's (2012)** *Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits*. In *Scarp*, Papadimitriou develops his method of deep topography, which situates places as sources of knowledge through a practice of walking, observing, and gathering stories both fictional and factual. This method encourages 'a forensic interrogation of place and becomes a means of analysing how history, memory and culture aggregate over time and are absorbed into the fabric of our cities.' Smith explores how *Scarp* weaves together layers of observation, interpretation, anecdote, archive, geol-

ogy and geography to demonstrate that landscape is not a passive site to be merely traversed, but is rather an active depository of history and memory.

A different approach to visual methodologies is presented in **J. Gary Knowles, Teresa C. Luciani, Andra L. Cole and Lorri Neilsen's (2007)** *The Art Of Visual Inquiry*, reviewed by **Nina Trivedi**. This book presents a diverse collection of essays authored by and intended for artists, practice-led doctoral researchers, and artistic and social science researchers attentive to the intersections of art and the social sciences. This collection, according to Trivedi, allows insight into the ways in which artists write about their work, define research-led art practice and position the visual as central to inquiry.

Finally, **Carl Root's** review of **Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco's (2012)** *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, returns us to the theme of 'precarity,' which has been the 'hot topic' in recent GJSS editions. According to Root, Hedges and Sacco provide a powerful polemical discussion on increasing inequality and injustice in America, where the gaping chasm between the powerful elite and the precariat is growing ever wider. Through an innovative combination of graphic novel-style reporting with historical and biographical narratives, they offer 'a scathing critique of corporate capitalism' and its impacts on com-

munities and ecosystems. Combining historical context and individual narratives with graphic illustration, Root describes *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* as 'a wonderful example of the social imagination expressed through a visual methodology', where 'illustrations narrate' and 'narratives illustrate' the political and economic realities of America's past and present.

To conclude, we hope that our readers enjoy the contributions in this edition as much as we have enjoyed editing them. As always, we warmly invite your reflections on this edition and would furthermore like to encourage readers to continue dialogues on the topic of *Visual Methodologies*. If you would like to contribute a short essay or reflection paper on this topic, for possible future publication, please do contact the editors (editors@gjss.org).

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