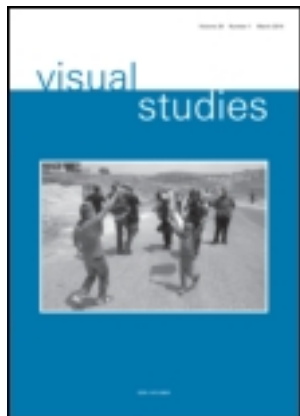


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Sociology of the visual sphere (Routledge Advances in Sociology Series)

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students from Jackson Heights, Queens, who worked with Ewald to create a visual presentation of the Arabic alphabet, are specifically about the visual arts. Artist Harrel Fletcher's work is illustrated by several video frames from *Blot Out the Sun*, the collaborative project he produced with gas station owner, Jay Dykeman, and his customers. In spite of the inclusion of these images, however, the conversations, even in these more visually centred arts, pivot around the collaborative process. Questions of authorship, project success and community-building direct *What We Made*. In spite of this focus, the book is a strong collection of thoughtfully interrogated projects that will appeal to those interested in the visual.

Finkelpearl concludes the book by examining the analytical relevance of the work of the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (and the revival of his work in the neopragmatist writings of Richard Rorty). Citing the antispectatorial character of socially cooperative art, he defines the connection to Dewey:

The pragmatists' critique of the spectatorial is twofold: first, they attack the 'fictive spectator theory of knowledge'...; second, armed with a social and contextual concept of reality many of them seek action and engagement over distanced philosophizing. (343)

This last chapter is the weakest of the book. Finkelpearl's point is that it can be fruitful to look at this art through a pragmatist lens. However, after outlining Dewey's emphasis on experiential education and drawing connections to the participatory impulse of socially collaborative art, the author states that Dewey's influence on these practices is indirect. His earlier contextualisation of community-based art in the framework and influences of the social movements of the 1960s was far more synthetic and insightful.

In spite of this minor flaw and the text's concentration on social processes over the role of the visual, *What We Made* perceptively documents work that often is misunderstood within traditional arts structures. The book is a valuable, narrative-rich addition to two recent analyses of the field – Arlene Goldbard's *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development* (2006) and Jan Cohen Cruz's *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (2005).

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Goldbard, A. 2006. *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*. Oakland, CA: New Village Press.

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Sociology of the visual sphere (Routledge Advances in Sociology Series)

edited by Regev Nathansohn and Denis Zuev

New York: Routledge, 2013, 192 pages

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Reviewed by Maureen Mullinax, Xavier University

With the stated intention to “normalize” visual sociology as an integral component of sociological study’ (1), editors Regev Nathansohn and Denis Zuev have drawn together the work of eleven scholars from eight countries who ponder two questions that guide this insightful collection of essays: first, what is the visual sphere and second, how can we go about studying it sociologically. As the editors underscore, the volume’s authors attend to the socio-historical contexts within which the visual exists and to their interactions with ‘other sociological factors such as class, gender, ethno-racial power relations and institutionalization’ (1–2). The essays are theoretically rich and draw on a range of traditions including symbolic interactionism, semiotics, feminist theory and post-structuralism.

In ‘Part I: Visualizing the Social, Socializing the Visual’, the authors examine the visual sphere from a variety of angles. In the opening essay, ‘The Limits of the Visualizing the “War without Witness”’, Pavithra Tantriga discusses the manipulation of media images by both sides of the political conflict between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. She emphasises the importance of critically examining the political context of images and their potential misrepresentation of ‘reality’. Ayelet Kohn follows with a discussion of the use of humour in Israeli photojournalism in ‘From a Slight Smile to Scathing Sarcasm’. Kohn highlights the production control photographers have in their ability to frame an image for comic political effect, unbeknownst to the subjects of their images. In ‘Sociology of Iconoclasm: Distrust of Visuality in the Digital Age’, Lukasz Rogowski looks at contemporary forms of iconoclasm (transformative, digital and everyday) and explores how the digital manipulation of images alters relations between transformative social change and the visual sphere. Nathansohn and Zuev succinctly describe Rogowski’s argument in this way: he ‘paints the visual sphere as a battlefield where images are both the targets and the means of achieving the targets’ (4).

Anna Schorber provides a stimulating chapter with 'Picturing "Gender": Iconic Figuration, Popularization, and the Contestation of a Key Discourse in the New Europe'. Considering how normative conceptions of gender are negotiated, contested, and transformed, she analyses how the visual sphere can be used as a space for transforming narratives and myths. In her words:

my approach aims at integrating visual culture studies for the analysis of the public life of gender. The investigation focuses not in image worlds as products but as acts that trigger processes of reception or become sites of struggles, and on how pictorial worlds are linked to those passages in the mythical and ideological realm by which people make sense of their lives. (62)

She illustrates her thesis with a set of provocative images that play with viewers' perception of gender categories, such as a haunting painting by Jenny Saville of a reclining nude who has female breasts and male genitalia.

Contributors to Part II of the volume consider new methodological approaches to studying the visual sphere sociologically. In 'Production of Solidarities in YouTube: A Visual Study of Uyghur Nationalism', Matteo Vergani and Dennis Zuev discuss their qualitative approach to studying the ideological codes of political videos produced by activist members of the Uyghur diaspora, dispersed across the globe. Vergani and Zuev's content analysis of these videos uncovers four distinct interpretive communities who use these media tools, which utilise distinct symbols in visual representations as tactical responses to the political and cultural repression of the Chinese state.

Timothy Shortell and Jerome Krase offer a particularly strong and clear methodological essay in 'On the Visual Semiotics of Collective Identity in Urban Vernacular Spaces'. Collecting researcher-produced images of urban spaces in 13 global cities, the authors have developed an archive of over 9000 images of both physical and social streetscapes. They employ this photographic survey method to analyse how immigrants in global cities perform identity in these urban spaces. Rather than simply treating images as documentary or descriptive sources of information, they argue that the analysis of visual data must be approached using a theoretical framework, whether through the semiotic and symbolic interactionist lenses that they use in their visual semiotics of vernacular landscapes or through other theoretical means.

Valentina Anzise and Cristiano Mutti employ a mixed method approach to examine people's perception of

their urban environments in 'Representing Perception: Integrating Photo Elicitation and Mental Maps in the Study of Urban Landscape'. Through an interactive process involving the co-production of visual data with their research subjects, they explore how using both photo elicitation and mental maps allowed them to compare the data collected from urban spaces in Milan and to overcome the limitations of each methodology, thereby strengthening their confidence in the results.

Described by the editors as having the potential to 'open creative research horizons within the widening field of visual sociology' (9), the final essay in the volume, 'Operations of Recognition: Seeing Urbanizing Landscapes with the Feet', by Christian Von Wissel, obscures more than it elucidates. Using the visual-sensory research method of 'seeing with the feet' to examine how we look at the process of global urbanisation, Von Wissel draws on the work of the artist Robert Smithson whose 'Tour of the Monuments of Passaic' is based on his practice of walking and 'site-seeing'. Applying this holistic sensorial technique, or what he calls his 'circumambulatory knowing of the world' (173) to walks in urban spaces in New York and Mexico City, Von Wissel describes how we can become involved in the subject of what we are researching. While attention to how we as researchers can immerse our whole sensory selves in the environments we study and in the process become active producers of meaning is insightful, Von Wissel's reliance on a dense post-structuralist framework, unfortunately, places unnecessarily heavy demands on the reader.

Sociology of the Visual Sphere is a thought-provoking collection of essays that both advances the study of the visual and secures it a central place at the sociological table. It achieves the goal of eloquently giving prominence to diverse theoretical and methodological approaches to the visual sphere. The editors' choice to draw on contributors from across the globe lends the text a distinct polyvocality. This slim, but intellectually rich, volume would be a provocative addition to a graduate-level visual sociology and/or qualitative research methods curriculum.

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Continuous revolution: Making sense of Cultural Revolution culture

by Barbara Mittler
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