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VISUAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE URBAN CITY AND ITS RESIDENTS

*“Of Course in this you see more than I can see. You see me.”
Marlowe in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*

*“We must measure our explanations against the power of
scientific imagination to bring us into touch with lives of strangers”
Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture*

*“Photological Proof is not stringent, merely Overpowering”
J. Adorna*

This seminar is intended for upper-division students who will meet one a week.

Most images of the urban city pitches it as either “fabulous” or “dangerous.” One can attend museums, theater, concerts, movies, and buy the latest fashions all within the city. It is also one in the residents walk the streets late at night, dance the night away, run into drug dealers, hear gun shots or find their cars burglarized. All this happens in small town America as well. But the urban city images are writ large. In other words, the urban city is a perfect place in which to capture images that speak to the experiences of living in and with these contradictions. In this course, we will attempt to capture these images and others as well as the social structures and social relations including race/ethnic dealings, that may influence some images.

Visual sociology is an area of sociology concerned with the visual dimensions of social life. In this context, the camera is analogous to a tape recorder. According to John Grady, the classroom provides a very useful site for developing the skill and sensibilities of visual sociology. . Film and video cameras are particularly well suited as data gathering technologies for experiments and for small group interactions, classroom studies, ethnography, participant observations, oral history, and the use of urban space.

The aim of this course: is to develop students' potential to interpret the products of visual communication in a rigorous and sociologically disciplined fashion, to demonstrate utility of

video-photographic technologies in field research, based on the Grounded Theory approach first developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glazer.

PhotoVoice blends a grassroots approach to photography and social action. It provides cameras not to health specialists, policy makers, or professionals, but to people with least access to those who make decisions affecting their lives. Photovoice has three main goals: 1. To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns; 2. to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs; and 3. to reach policy makers. <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/201294>). Also for discussion of the benefits of using photographs, see Sarah Pink. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, 2nd. Edition. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007.

Images are unique forms of data. It is a physical record of something that has happened at some time or another. Images can represent complex subjective processes in an extraordinarily objective form. Learning how to manage and interpret images is an ideal way to learn about data in general and to introduce students to the craft of sociology. Thinking, writing and talking about and with, images not only can make arguments more vivid, but also more lucid.

Visual sociology integrates the analysis and production of visual representation into the disciplined study of social relations. What makes images so valuable as a mode of human communications is that they encode an enormous amount of information in a single display or representation. One way of helping students develop a sociological imagination about everyday things that they might otherwise take for granted is to show them how photographs and video clips of these everyday things are rich repositories of information that can be used in theory and analysis. Just imagine what students can discover about their own surroundings.

Being visual means learning a craft that allows you to bring your world alive with the use of the camera.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is a small semester and as such, each person will make a contribution to the intellectual life of the course. To do so, each person will do all of the reading, become familiar with the terms and concepts used in the course and take responsibility for helping us develop them. At the conclusion of the course, all participants (including the instructor!) should know more about some aspects of social life than they did before the course, should have better skills for learning about the social world, and should have refined their observational skills, so that with or without the camera, they will be more knowledgeable observers of their surroundings. The final project will represent photos from all of the groups that have been critiqued and supported with written material that contribute to our understanding of the urban city and its residents. Students will read the required material, examine magazines to understand the power of images and their meaning to us and take photographs (\$5.00 disposable camera will work) of

the urban environment. Students will form groups of 2-3 in which they will determine the focus of their photos, why that focus is meaningful to understanding the urban city, and what kind of images will best tell the story of that environment. The group will learn how to code the images, evaluate the shots, and present their work to the class. They will learn to evaluate the photos of others. Each group will write a visual paper.* See visual paper guidelines.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

DO NOT BE LATE: If you are over 5 minutes late, that will be counted as ½ day absence.

THIS SYLLABUS IS NOT WRITTEN IN STONE. SOME CHANGES MAY BE NECESSARY

The midterm and final exams will consist of short answers and essays. The midterm will be based on readings, lectures, film, and class discussions during weeks 1-6. The final exam will cover all course material.

NOTE ON REVIEWS: REVIEWS WILL TAKE PLACE IN CLASS. YOU SHOULD ALSO ARRANGE TO HAVE ONE INDIVIDUAL REVIEW MEETING WITH INSTRUCTOR PRIOR TO ALL EXAMS.

EXTRA-CREDIT

Worth up to 4 pts. You may receive extra credit for special assignments. JEP students may only do one extra credit assignments. Non-JEP students may do only two assignments. You may receive extra credit for special assignments by designing your own special project-see instructor for approval before starting work. You may choose to view a film (currently showing in theaters

or on video) and write a three-page analysis in which you show how it does or does not relate to the class themes. Include in your discussion, one of the readings or concepts discussed in class.

*See page 9 for a few suggestions.

Joint Educational Project: You may choose to earn extra credit by participating in the Joint Educational Project (JEP). As a participant in JEP, you will serve as a mentor or tutor for children in local schools or after-school programs. Over the years, participants have found it both personally and intellectually rewarding. They have gained new insights about urban social problems. This is a chance for you to study how the concepts and issues that we discuss in class work in real life. If all goes well, you can use your JEP experience as the basis for a paper and earn a ½ final grade increase (for example, a final grade based on work= A- with JEP, final grade=A). You are also work on 1 other extra-credit assignment.

Neighborhood Academic Initiative Program. Limited to 4 students. As a participant in NAI, you will serve as a tutor for children in the after-school program located on this campus. You may find it both personally and intellectually rewarding. You will gain new insights about urban social problems. This is a chance for you to study how the concepts and issues that we discuss in class work in real life. If all goes well, you can use your NAI experience as the basis for a paper and earn a ½ final grade increase (for example, a final grade based on work= A- with NAI, final grade=A). You can also work on 1 other extra-credit assignment.

The Rules for Class room Etiquette

In this class, students will be encouraged to debate various controversial issues. In order to do so, we need to provide an open and supportive environment in which candid discussions can take place and one in which students show respect for their fellow students, TAS. and the instructor. Therefore, students will not engage in conversations with other students, rusting papers, make other kinds of distracting noises, which includes slamming doors when they leave or engaging in any kind of disruptive behavior during ALL class discussions **and ALL lectures. Students who do not observe this rule will be told to LEAVE THE CLASS AND MAY BE BARRED FROM FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN THE CLASS.**

General Policies

You are required to:

1. Complete all reading assignments before you attend class. You will get more out of the lectures and discussions if you are prepared.
2. Participate actively in class: ask questions, raise doubts, disagree with others (politely!). Take responsibility for your own, and others' learning experience.
3. TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE BEFORE YOU COME TO CLASS. IF YOUR PHONE RINGS DURING LECTURE, YOU WILL HAVE TO LEAVE THE CLASS.
4. DO NOT OPEN/USE YOUR COMPUTER IN CLASS UNLESS YOU HAVE PERMISSION FROM INSTRUCTOR.
5. Attend class and sections regularly. If you are going to miss class/section, let your TA know in advance.

6. Do not indulge in academic misconduct (Do not talk or laugh with your classmate during lecture)
7. Express your perspectives/questions/doubts regarding the readings.

Required Reading:

1. Howard S. Becker. *Telling About Society* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2007.
2. Mariso Clark-Ibáñez. "Framing the Social World with Photo-Elicitation Interviews." *The American Behavioral Scientist* 47, no. 12 (2004)
3. Mitchell Duneier. *Sidewalk: With Photographs by Ovie Carter*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
4. Elaine Bell Kaplan *Using Photos to Study the Lives of Inner-City Teens*
5. Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001

Grades:

Mid-term	25%
Group Projects	20
Final Exam	25
Final Project	20
Attendance/Participation	10

	100%

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1
Jan. 10-
INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE: ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS
Philosophy, reading requirements, main themes
Handouts: Syllabus
Read and discuss syllabus
Discuss projects and common
Images of the urban city and its residents

Reading: Howard S. Becker. *Telling About Society* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2007. Chaps. 1-4
Becker's book, *Telling About Society* explores the unconventional ways we communicate what we know about society to others. The book explores the many way knowledge about society can be shared and interpreted through different forms of telling fiction, films, photographs, maps, even mathematical models—many of which remain outside the boundaries of conventional social science. Eight case studies, including the photographs of Walker Evans, the plays of George Bernard Shaw, the

novels of Jane Austen and Italo Calvino, and the sociology of Erving Goffman, provide convincing support for Becker's argument: that every way of telling about society is perfect—for some purpose. Jan

Week 2
Jan. 17

THEORIES OF VISUAL SOCIOLOGY

We will discuss the theoretical explanation for visual sociology
In this context, the camera is analogous to a tape recorder. Film and video cameras are particularly well suited as data gathering technologies for experiments and small group interactions, classroom studies, ethnography, participant observation, oral history, the use of urban space, etc.
Reading: Becker, chaps. 5-10

Week 3
Jan. 24

THEORIES OF VISUAL SOCIOLOGY CONTINUES

This lecture will examine and practice ways to combine the two disciplines of sociology and photography. In other words, we will explore how to use the camera as sociologists and how to sociologically examine photographs.
Reading Becker, chaps. 6-11

Week 4
Jan. 31

DOING VISUAL SOCIOLOGY

For two weeks, the lecture will focus on how to read and analyze images of the urban city and its residents in magazine

Form groups of three/four

Each group will decide on a project involving the urban area and residents. For example, take pictures of area surrounding USC, or the urban neighborhoods where you reside, shop, or attend movies. What is it you want to tell us about that area and/or its residents? What story do your photos reveal that helps us understand urban life?

Reading: Pink, Sarah. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.
Part 1-2

Week 5
Feb. 7

DOING VISUAL SOCIOLOGY CONTINUES

The Lecture will focus on how to read and analyze
City Space. We will examine the social context within which photographs are taken, are made available to various audiences, and are viewed and interpreted by those audiences. Here our concerns are with issues of representation and interpretation. We will rely on the writings of sociologists. We will also assess our own responses to images and sets of images presented in various contexts (online, in book and article reproductions, in exhibitions).

Pink, Part 3-4

Groups will meet to discuss ideas for their projects

Week 6
Feb. 14

OBSERVING, APPROACHING AND BUILDING RAPPORT

We will learn how social scientists combine qualitative methods of sociological research (ethnographic methods) with the use of the camera as an observational and documentary tool. Doing visual sociology is not just a matter of knowing how to make photographs or recognizing what is going on; it also relies upon the capacity to approach people, build rapport, come back to approach the same people, and become part of a situation without changing it appreciably.

Dunier, SideWalk, A statement on methods, p 333, chap. 1

This book investigates the complex social ecology of a three-block span of New York's Greenwich Village.

Week 7
Feb. 21

MID-TERM

Take home. Will consist of short answers and essays based on reading/lecture material covered weeks 1-6. Due in class, Feb, 28

Group reports on projects

Dunier, finish chap. 1

Week 8
Feb. 28

ANALYZING AND CODING PROCESS

Mid-Term exams due

For two weeks we will focus on analyzing group projects

Dunier, Part 2

Week 9
Mar. 6

ANALYZING AND CODING PROCESS CONTINUES

Continue with analysis, Part 3

SPRING BREAK MAR. 12-17

Week 10
Mar.20

THE VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS

For two weeks we will focus on how to write a visual paper

Dunier, Part. 4

Week 11
Mar 27

VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES

Kaplan, study of inner-city life

Dunier, chap. 5 and Appendix, statement on method

Week 12
Apr. 3

VISUAL PAPER PROJECT PROJECTS CONTINUES

For the next three weeks, we will have group presentations

The Case of Bell, CA.

Clark-Ibanez, “Framing the Social World with Photo-Elicitation Interviews”

Week 13
Apr. 10

VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES
Finish Clark-Ibanez reading

Week 14
Apr. 17

VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES
Xerox reading handout

Week 15
Apr. 24

THE FINAL PROJECT
The Urban City Collage
The final project will consist of bringing together the photos that tell stories of the urban city and its residents

FINAL EXAM–Take Home
Due Thursday, May 3 at 2 pm.

Overview of Visual Paper Using Power Point

1, The visual paper has to follow the traditional organization required for
all papers, including thesis, literature review, method section, analysis, discussion of theories and findings. (see expanded guidelines on page 10)

2. You may handle the above by:
 - a. reading them as narratives when you show pictures or camera work,
 - b. or include the narratives directly in video—by voice over.
3. The following is due before you present your work in class.
 - a. copy of power point slide and CD that will be returned to you.
 - b. Paper outline that includes:
 - Summary of all material discussed in power point/CD
(Introduction, literature review, methodology, theory, analysis, and link to class topics/issues).
 - Summary of narratives, if not included in CD narratives
 - Separate reference page

VISUAL PAPER RESEARCH PAPER GUIDELINE

The sections that are highlighted here are meant to give you more information on what is required for the visual paper. It is necessary that you answer all questions that are listed in this guideline. Outlining your paper according to this guide will help you cover all the necessary components for this paper.

INTRODUCTION The introduction defines the problem or issue that is worthy of study. What is your research question? Why is it worthy of study? What is the social or societal significance of your study?

THESIS OR HYPOTHESIS This statement directly follows the literature review and tells the reader what you expect to find prior to your data analysis and why. You are speculating about what you may find in terms of an answer to the research question. You are carving out your original contribution to this field of research question and need to point out why you think your study is important; i.e.; perhaps you are addressing a question that has been neglected in prior research.

THEORY: Be sure to link your work with theories discussed in lecture.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE . Encapsulates what others have said on your subject of investigation. This section “reviews” (summarizes and critiques) the range of debates on your subject matter. This is library research involving the use of academic journals, periodical articles and books. Look for themes and emphasize major findings rather than trying to report every study ever done on the subject. Specifically, look at the academic journals for your major sources of information (i.e., the American Sociological Associations Journal, California Sociology, etc.) These journals are your primary sources. Mainstream magazines (Times, Newsweek, etc) can only be used as secondary sources but should not make up the bulk of your research.

METHOD: In this section, explain how you did your research. How did you gather your data? Interview or survey? If so, how? Describe why you chose to ask the questions that you did and what they are being used to measure? How did you choose your sampler population and why? Include time it took to do interview, age, gender, race/ethnicity, occupation of interviewees. Make sure to answer all these methodologies questions because they are crucial to your sociological analysis. Be sure to include range of questions you asked in the paper. You will need to also include your entire questionnaire in an appendix. If this is a library research paper, state where did you do your research (which library). If you used web sources, be sure you do not rely only on this source (three web sources should do).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS. This section summarizes and discusses the major research findings from your study, and addresses your original thesis or hypothesis. Here is where

conclusions or inferences are drawn and strategies formed. In essence, this is an essay about your findings and should be reviewed as your original contribution to this area of research. (For examples, look at some of the articles you will use in the paper. Note how these authors integrate their empirical findings from interviews with previous research). In this analysis, note what contradictions may exist compared to past academic work or what concurs with previous work.

Conclusion. This section ends the visual paper with a brief summary-reviewing the highlights of the report. This also is where you can point out shortcomings of the research and make suggestions for further research.

