



# **Visual Methodologies**

**Edited by Alexa Athelstan  
and Rosemary Deller**



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# CONTENTS

<b>Contributors</b>	5
<b>Editorial</b>	
<i>Visual Methodologies</i> Alexa Athelstan and Rosemary Deller	9
<b>Articles</b>	
<i>Picturing Social Inclusion: Photography and Identity in Downtown Eastside Vancouver</i> Natalie Robinson	20
<i>Applying Visual Methods in the Study of Place Affiliation, Mobility, and Belonging</i> Stine Thidemann Faber, Karina Torp Møller and Helene Pristed Nielsen	43
<i>Photographic Postcards as Research Tools: The 'Postcards from the Cut' Study</i> Zoë K. Millman	54
<i>'It's Coming from the Heart': Exploring a Student's Experiences of 'Home' Using Participatory Visual Methodologies</i> Lindsey Jayne McCarthy	76
<i>Seeing and Telling Households: A Case for Photo Elicitation and Graphic Elicitation in Qualitative Research</i> Liz Bridger	106
<i>Using Participatory and Visual Methods to Address Power and Identity in Research with Young People</i> Joanne Hill	132
<i>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</i> Dai O'Brien	152
<i>The Urban Photography Summer School at Goldsmiths, University of London: A Discussion and Photo Essay on Urban Rhythm</i> Ruben Demasure	176

## **Book Reviews**

<i>Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials (Third edition)</i> by Gillian Rose Chiara Valli	191
<i>Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits</i> by Nick Papadimitriou Steve Smith	195
<i>The Art Of Visual Inquiry (Volume 3, Arts-Informed Inquiry Series)</i> edited by J. Gary Knowles, Teresa C. Luciani, Ardra L. Cole and Lorri Neilsen Nina Trivedi	200
<i>Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt</i> by Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco Carl Root	204

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# Editorial

## Visual Methodologies

Alexa Athelstan and Rosemary Deller

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'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 canal-landscape; 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](mailto:editors@gjss.org)).

### Acknowledgements

We would like to begin by thanking all members of the GJSS editorial team. In this edition, we would particularly like to express our thanks to Melissa Kelly, our Book Review Editor, who has been managing the book review section of the GJSS for the past two years and who is handing over her position to Sanaz Raji with this edition. Melissa, we wish you all the very best in your future projects. Thanks also to Megan O’Branski, Nadia Hai and Apostol Péter Zaproš, for their dedicated attention to detail and for

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# Picturing Social Inclusion: Photography and Identity in Downtown Eastside Vancouver

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*This article offers an exploration of the relationship between photography and identity in the marginalised urban space, focussing specifically on the annual Hope in Shadows photography contest in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). Through an analysis of field-based research, I demonstrate how individuals in the DTES have used photography to (re)create notions of self and community identity, and explore what findings suggest for the development of participatory, visual methodologies. I discuss how a participatory visual model might enable socially excluded individuals to engage with the public sphere, actively claiming recognition within and outside of the DTES neighbourhood. Drawing on existing literature in visual sociology, this article explores the potential of resident-led photography in emancipating participant 'lifeworlds' from their excluded status, opening up multiple avenues to social action. I argue for the potential of the camera in person-centred research: promoting a recognition of C. Wright Mills' (1959) 'personal troubles' as 'public issues', encouraging dialogical understandings between urban in-groups and out-groups, and enabling the (re)assertion of affirmative social presence for excluded urban communities.*

*Keywords: Downtown Eastside Vancouver, Photography, Identity, Advocacy.*

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*Photography, more than merely representing, has contributed to the emergence of a way of seeing ... this way of seeing informs contemporary self-understandings.*

(Lury 1998, 218)

Through a theoretical and field-based exploration of the urban photography contest 'Hope in Shadows', this article explores the

perceived connection between photography and identity in the city, investigating the potential of the camera for the (re)creation/assertion of individual and collective identities in Downtown Eastside Vancouver (DTES). I position the practice and discussion of community photography as an enabling process, inviting individuals and groups to bring their personal troubles to the level

of public issues by setting their life-worlds in a wider visual context.

The Hope in Shadows contest is an annual event in the DTES, involving the distribution of disposable cameras to low-income residents of the area with the brief to use photography to 'document their own community' (Pivot Legal Society 2012). The contest is the flagship project of Hope in Shadows Inc., a charitable organisation based in the DTES, who describe their aim as: 'creating positive social change for people and communities impacted by poverty and marginalization' (Hope in Shadows 2013). Hope in Shadows work with a variety of non-profit organisations, including Pivot Legal Society, a community advocacy service promoting rights for vulnerable individuals – with campaigns for accountable policing, sex worker rights, safe and appropriate housing, harm reduction and legislative reform for drug users – as well as coordinating the Hope in Shadows photography contest on an annual basis, specifically for DTES residents.

John Richardson (Pivot Director: 2000–2011) describes the DTES neighbourhood as: 'where our society's greatest fears – of poverty, abuse, crime – are anchored ... often the result of misunderstanding' (cited in Cran and Jerome 2008, 31). It is this misunderstanding that the Hope in Shadows project seeks to resist by offering residents the opportunity to create a counter-discourse to media stereotypes.

The contest offers a C\$500 award for the best overall photograph, as well as four awards of \$100 for Best Portrait, Best Urban Landscape, Best Colour and Best Black and White Photograph (all film submitted is printed in colour and in black and white) to be judged by a panel of artists, photographers, community-workers and residents. There are four DTES Community Awards of \$40, voted for by residents from the judges' selection of the 'Top Forty'. Photographs are exhibited across the city at galleries and community venues, and can also be accessed through an online archive (Flickr). The top twelve images are available to buy in calendars from street vendors in the city and a wider selection of photographs can be purchased in large print format with 50% of the proceeds (after costs) going directly to the photographer (Hope in Shadows 2012). The contest celebrated its first decade in 2012 with the theme 'What I value in my Downtown Eastside Community' and provided the focal point for my study into how photography is used by, and might be liberating for, socially excluded individuals and groups. I am interested in how individuals understand the process and products of the Hope in Shadows contest and how they might relate this to perceptions of identity. My working definition of identity is informed by George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionism, as located 'within the ebb and flow of practice and process ... things that people

do' (Jenkins 1998, 4). My use of the term 'social exclusion' is informed by Prue Chamberlayne et al.'s (2000, 8) definition, as recognising 'disadvantage as a multidimensional social condition, and not merely one of material deprivation'. The definition takes into account the multiple exclusionary circumstances such as material poverty, mental and physical disability, drug addiction and crime, which are visible in the DTES area (Newnham 2005, 4).

The work to date in the field of visual sociology inspires my own. In 'Visual Sociology: Expanding Sociological Vision', Douglas Harper (1988) discusses the use of the image in early editions of American Sociological Association journals. Harper points to 'thirty-one articles using photographs as evidence and illustration' (1896–1916), the relative 'absence of visual sociology' (1920–60), with the tentative re-emergence of the (sub)discipline thereafter. Indeed, the field is becoming increasingly popular today – with many keen advocates writing towards the use of the visual in research (Chaplin 1994; Knowles and Sweetman 2009; Margolis and Pauwels 2011; Harper 2012; Milne et al. 2012), as well as utilising photography and film in field-based projects (Knowles 2000; Radley et al. 2005; O'Neill 2011; Blakey et al. 2012; Harper 2012). Various visual techniques are employed by researchers, such as 'photo-elicitation' – where participants are

asked to discuss photographic content relevant to the research and/or use images as stimuli for debate – and 'photovoice' – which involves participants taking their own photographs and then discussing these with the researcher (Wang & Burris 1997; Purcell 2009; Harper 2012). In *Visual Sociology* (2012), Harper cites eighty-four published articles in fifty-four journals specifically using or regarding photo-elicitation methods (2012, 179) and 'just under ninety' articles published in fifty-seven journals using photovoice-type methods. Harper comments that 'few if any' of these articles were from the mainstream of sociology or anthropology (2012, 190). There is a case to be made for the visual as a vital methodological tool in the social sciences and related fields, and as an approach ready to be shifted from the periphery to the centre of academic debate.

For the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA), visual sociology includes, but is not limited to:

documentary studies of everyday life in contemporary communities; the interpretive analysis of art and popular visual representations of society; studies of the messages, meanings, and social impact of advertising and the commercial use of images; the analysis of archival images as sources of data on society and culture; *the study of the purpose and meaning of*

*image-making* such as recreational and family photography and videography (IVSA 2012, italics mine).

My work focusses on the latter (italicised) aspect of the field, with an emphasis on still photography, the medium used in the Hope in Shadows contest. My focus on photography does not intend to disregard the value of other visual methods – for example, participatory video (Ledford 2011; Milne 2012), participatory mapping (Emmel 2008; O’Neill 2011) and community arts practice (Goldbard 2006).

I seek specifically to expand upon the sociological work of Harper (1982, 2012), Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), Caroline Knowles (2000), Alan Radley et al. (2005), and Maggie O’Neill (2011) – all of whom have utilised and discussed visual methods in their respective studies focussed on in/exclusion in the city. Work in the field has been largely researcher-led; visual methods have been applied within the remit of organised projects involving the purposeful recruitment of participants. In *Good Company*, Harper (1982) presents an immersive study into the lives of American ‘rail tramps’. Harper lived and travelled with the men he researched, and created a photographic record of the time spent with these individuals. In *Bedlam on the Streets*, Knowles (2000) includes photographs to illustrate research under-

taken with homeless and vulnerably-housed individuals in Montréal. The pictures were taken by Ludovic Dabert, a photographer employed specifically for the project. Although both Harper and Knowles provide models for meaningful, involved ethnography, I maintain that a more democratic approach to visual research lies in allowing participants to take control of the camera and of their own representation. Examples of participant-led photography can be seen in the work of Radley et al. (2005) and Wang et al. (2000), who worked with homeless individuals in photovoice projects in Bristol, UK and Ann Arbor, Michigan respectively. However, though the photographs in these studies were taken by participants, images were created explicitly for academic projects, positioned within a research agenda from the outset.

The Hope in Shadows contest is professedly not policy-motivated nor a product of a research initiative; its only expressed aim is to enable individuals in the DTES to record their experiences (Wong, pers. comm.). Brad Cran and Gillian Jerome’s (2008) book *Hope in Shadows: Stories and Photographs of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside* focusses specifically on the annual contest – presenting photographs taken alongside personal responses to them and short biographies of the individual participants. The book is the only work published to date on the subject of Hope in Shadows

and is identified by the editors as deliberately outside of the academic sphere (2008, 16), opening up an opportunity for a scholarly reading of the event. Such an analysis will facilitate an increased, critical understanding of how individuals use photography and what this might mean for future developments in research – something that Cran and Jerome’s text can only infer. My work looks to understand the contest process and its effect through the lens of cultural and sociological theory and through my own qualitative fieldwork with individuals in the DTES.

My exploration of the Hope in Shadows project endeavours to understand how photography encourages the extension of self-identity into the physical urban space. Harold M. Proshansky’s (1978) notion of ‘urban place-identity’ informs my exploration of the significance of the physical environment, and of visual accounts focussed on the city: ‘those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal-identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioural tendencies relevant to this environment’ (1978, 155). I suggest that the literal act of photographing the neighbourhood will provide an account of how individuals in the DTES respond to their world, in past, present and aspira-

tional terms. This article goes some-way to respond to Proshansky’s call to deepen and extend his own discussion: ‘to explore by means of an appropriate methodology the urban place-identities of some sample of residents of an urban metropolis’ (1978, 168). The continued relevance of a ‘reflective relationship between place and self-identity’ (Krase 1982) is identified in the current objectives of the CUNY Public Space Research Group (PSRG), which, through various urban-based research projects, focusses on the interplay between space, people and communities (PSRG 2013). The perceived link between urban space, place and identity will be explored through the analysis of my fieldwork in the DTES. This article explores the use of photography in the Hope in Shadows contest in terms of individual and collective identity representation and (re) creation, offering a discussion of how and why residents of a socially marginalised neighbourhood create and share visual images, and what this means for their sense of space, place and self.

### **Fieldwork in the DTES**

Fieldwork was undertaken in June 2012, to coincide with the tenth annual Hope in Shadows contest. Research involved the facilitation of two focus groups in the DTES, utilising photographs from the Hope in Shadows archive as



stimuli and concentrating on what the contest process, images and exhibition have meant for individuals and their community. Harper states: 'when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs they are trying to figure something out together. This is, I believe, the ideal model for research' (1988, 23). Like Harper, I hope that the use of images in research may go some way towards democratising dialogue between participant and researcher. I suggest that talking about an image nurtures perspective through providing a stimulus for thought, a deliberate call for an individual to take a moment to pause and think about the detail before them. The image can be read subjectively, interpreted and analysed from multiple points of view, and allows a platform for the marginalised and silenced to articulate-by-other-means, a subject matter that they find important. The work of Wang et al. (2000) supports the use of photography in advocacy. Wang et al.'s definition of photo-voice as participant-led photographic practice in research sets out the following objectives:

(1) to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers and people who can

be mobilized for change (Wang et al. 2000, 82).

Through my fieldwork, I explored how photography is used by individuals who do not necessarily have a policy-oriented agenda, but who do have an opinion about their identity and community. Heather Smith (2000) provides a geographic definition of 'community' that forms the basis for my own definition used throughout this article. I will talk about the DTES as a community based on an affiliation with the particular urban location. I will add that the DTES community is somewhat defined by the service provision across the neighbourhood, with individuals self-identifying in categories which are 'catered for' – for example by drugs, alcohol and mental health support organisations. From my own observation, the community seems to define itself as a whole through spatial, economic (low-income) boundaries, identifying members as individuals who live or spend the majority of their time in the area. For focus group participants, the words 'community' and 'neighbourhood' were used interchangeably.

My approach to research was informed by Phillipe Bourgois and Jeff Schonberg's immersive ethnography, *Righteous Dopefiend* (2009). Bourgois and Schonberg spent over a decade working with homeless drug users in San Francisco, combining in-depth fieldnotes, par-

ticipant dialogue, and black and white photographs to express the experiences of individuals. I hoped to capture the spirit of such reflexive ethnography in my own study, albeit limited by time and financial constraints. To this end, I involved myself in the Hope in Shadows contest camera hand-out and collection, meeting community members in the process. I attended various community-run events in the DTES, and spent time in the neighbourhood. I adopted an open and inclusive approach to fieldwork recruitment, conscious that on many occasions, individuals in the DTES have been silenced due to sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religious beliefs and/or perceived 'lifestyle choices' (Robertson and Culhane 2005; Guimond et al. 2009).

Focus groups took place at Carnegie Community Centre, located in the heart of the DTES, to ensure accessibility and approachability. Carnegie is an example of a service designed to meet the needs of neighbourhood residents by providing affordable meals and an array of activities run for and by community members. Located on the corner of Main and Hastings, the centre is a geographically central DTES landmark and as such, a tangible target for media attention. During my time in Vancouver, this location was described to me by city residents as forming part of 'the four corners of Hell,' due to the perceived and much publicised visibility of 'unsavoury'

individuals in the area. There is a clear tension between Carnegie as a positive and welcomed resource for residents, as discussed by focus group participants, and a site positioned as a place to be avoided by the wider Vancouver population.

Participants were recruited through poster advertisements and word of mouth in and around the community centre space. Participants were fully briefed with regards to the focus group theme ('photography, identity and community'), the reasons for my interest in the area, my position as researcher, and how their responses would be used. I ensured individual consent to research participation and made clear the right to withdraw at any point prior to, during or post-research. There was 67% male (6 participants) and 33% female attendance (2 participants); 67% identified as White Canadian and 33% identified as 'other', including First Nations and English (Commonwealth) origin. This is reflective of the diverse DTES demographic (Cooper 2006; Lewis et al. 2008), though due to the random selection process, this does not represent an entirely accurate population snapshot. The first focus group included Danny, Jack, Carl and Ron; the second focus group included Sam, Sarah, David and Clare. Laura was interviewed independently. Participants were aged between thirty-three and sixty-five. Danny identified as First Nations, and Sam identified in three ethnic

groups (Chinese, First Nations and other) with the rest of the participants as White Canadian or other (various). All names have been changed to preserve anonymity as far as possible.

Participants were shown a selection of photographs from the Hope in Shadows contest archive, depicting the DTES and its residents, as stimulus for debate. In their 2005 study, Radley et al. divided photographs taken by homeless participants into the following categories: self, homeless friends, homeless strangers, streets, places used by homeless people, details of hostel or life of homeless people, own room or possessions, buildings, space primarily used by others (2005, 280). The Hope in Shadows contest shows a similar range of photographs, of people and of buildings in the community, often focussing on shared spaces in the neighbourhood – the street, the park and shelters. DTES participants were encouraged to talk about their own contributions to the contest as well as any personal photographic practice and/or ideas for hypothetical images that they felt would represent their self and/or community identities. Focus groups were undertaken with a flexible format, in the style of semi-structured interviews. My approach was partly influenced by the ‘SHOWeD’ model, as discussed by Harper (2012). The SHOWeD acronym invites participants to a discussion based on the following framework:

What do you SEE here? What is really HAPPENING here? How does this relate to OUR lives? WHY does this situation exist? How can we become EMPOWERED by our new social understanding? What can we DO to address these issues? (Harper 2012, 202).

My reason for only loosely following the model is due to my recognition of the acronym as ‘over-directive and inimical to more natural discussions of images’ (202). I endeavoured to facilitate a more personal and spontaneous dialogue; I used pre-prepared notes to direct conversations thematically, allowing this to deviate to enable individuals to discuss issues that were meaningful to them. I reflected back my own understanding of what was discussed, to ensure the best possible representation of the focus group. Participants were provided with my contact details should any issues or additional comments arise post-fieldwork. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analysed dialogically, taking into account both the social context and the language used to express and understand photographic practice and image content in relation to identity (see Steinberg 1999, 733–4).

### **The Politics of (Mis)representation**

The Downtown Eastside is widely understood as a community

that is negatively represented by local, provincial and national media (Smith 2000; Robertson and Culhane 2005; Cran and Jerome 2008; Walls 2011; O'Neill and Seal 2012). Travel literature and internet travel sites warn against visiting, identifying the DTES as a place synonymous with deviance, framed in the forms of poverty, drug addiction and crime (Best Vancouver Guide; Lonely Planet; Tripadvisor; Virtual Tourist 2012). The area is notorious for being the poorest postal code in Canada (Newnham 2005, 4), sitting in contrast to the affluent living standards of the rest of Vancouver, a city that has been cited as the world's most liveable by the Economist Intelligence Unit survey numerous times over the past decade (The Economist 2011).

There was a sense of awareness in the focus group that DTES residents are individually and collectively positioned as 'Other', a feeling that they are judged by the world outside neighbourhood boundaries. This (perceived and actual) judgement is perpetuated through images that connote deviance. In my 2012 interview, Gillian Jerome referred to an influx of researchers, journalists and art students into the area, trying to take photographs that encapsulate the 'gritty' nature of the community. Participant discussion of the media focussed on the exploitative nature of journalists who were observed to be looking for a shocking story for entertainment purposes,

often at the expense of the residents themselves:

Jack: There's a history of people wanting to come here for a real Downtown Eastside dirty snapshot.

The 'dirty snapshot' can be understood as a realisation of Patricia Chauncey's concept of 'poornography', which 'depends on voyeurism and connotes exploitation' (Walls 2011, 144). The 'dirty snapshot' implies outsiders using the camera to capture a shocking or controversial image of the area that is seen as typifying the neighbourhood. The idea of the snapshot suggests fast-paced work, with no real investment in the community in focus:

Danny: My mum's been exploited quite a bit by ... a few different newspapers. They came ... they came down here before the Olympics and they took her picture and did an article on her, but they said ... they said they were going to do the positive side and so she told them her story and everything and they totally flipped it negative ... everything she said. They flipped everything and it was very damaging. It actually hurt her very very badly. Because she thought it was going to be very positive and then when the paper came out it was just ... it was so negative.

Danny's description of the media

portrayal of his mother as ‘damaging’ implies a significant impact on her self-perception and/or other’s perceptions of her. Other focus group participants added comments about the neighbourhood and its residents being consistent targets for negatively framed press. Negative representations of individuals in the community were understood as reflecting badly on the community as a whole. Danny’s discussion of the media treatment of his mother was met by sympathy within the focus group and with similar stories of their own experiences or the experiences of friends, family and/or acquaintances. The noted effect of negative media portrayal on DTES identities opens up a space for a counter-discourse framed in more positive terms. The feeling that the DTES is misrepresented was further emphasised by focus group participants who juxtaposed media images against resident-led photography in the Hope in Shadows contest. Focus group participants verbally contrasted the negative ‘lies’ of the media with the ‘truth’ of particular images taken by DTES residents, thereby challenging the dominant (external) definitions of their community. When shown a selection of photographs from the online archive, focus group participants showed particular interest in ‘The Hug’ (Elko 2003) – a photograph of a man hugging a child in the street, which they mutually agreed was representational of ‘the truth’:

Danny: ... because there’s love on the streets, right? And I think that kind of captures it, that picture (‘The Hug’) ... And that’s what ... that’s what I like to see, I like to see pictures like that picture.

Carl: That was the first thing that came into my mind, it is the truth – when you see this on the streets, because I’ve seen it lots of times. But my first thought when it came round to us this time was wow that’s something ... I don’t see that enough anymore.

This discussion between Danny and Carl positions the photograph as depicting ‘truth’ despite Carl’s assertion that demonstrations such as the hug pictured are no longer seen enough. For Carl, the truth is not represented through the regularity or consistency of street images, but through a normative claim. I argue that the photographs taken in the contest context are not a completely accurate depiction of life in the DTES since no one image can ever illustrate an objective reality; the photograph is a product of perspective. However, the shared understanding of ‘The Hug’ as ‘pure’ points to a collective understanding of how the DTES should be represented. The image is simultaneously coded and deciphered by residents of the DTES to represent their own truth, providing clear visual cues to suggest love and compassion. The photograph’s widely acknowledged

semiotic value positions it as an emblematic image of the human reality of the DTES community. This might be understood as a direct response to external stereotypes: presented in the binary language of the media.

Moving from collective to individual representations, I asked participants how they would use photography to portray self-identity. Carl's response prompted further debate regarding the understanding of 'truth':

Me with a blank piece of paper with one sentence saying something along the lines of 'the truth from my point of view' ... 'The truth as I see it' – because each of us see it a little different, right?

Carl presents an understanding of truth claims as situated and partial, reflecting the work of Harper (2012, 110). Carl's reference to the image of 'The Hug' as 'truth' seems to be informed by an understanding that the concept is fluid, transient and dependent on the standpoint of the individual. There was a sense that 'truthful' images could only be manipulated with the addition of language:

Sam: When you add a social or political or religious connotation to a shot and there's words attached to it, it's the words that dilute the photo because they take you on a different journey.

Sam comments on the differential levels of language-based and visual meaning. He appears to express the opinion that the photograph presents a social reality, while words distort it. Sam discussed the fact that he was illiterate until a relatively late age (thirty-eight). As a First Nations individual, this is not uncommon. Sam expresses a connection with nature and with the visual, bringing him closer to the image as a medium for understanding. Until relatively recently, the written word was a privilege of the external Other. For Sam, the text is a weapon that can be used to distort images negatively. Sam locates text in terms of mainstream print media, rather than as a tool for DTES resident voices.

Shifting the understanding of text from a weapon of the Other to a tool for community, I suggest that the addition of written or spoken narrative can enhance meaning and communicate an intended message more clearly. Though this can be deemed unnecessary in art photography, it is a useful approach if photographs are to be used to promote community values and/or needs to an external audience. For example, the image of the heroin user shooting up, with the addition of Carl's focus group commentary can change perception, removing the stigma of the 'dirty snapshot':

There was a young lady who came to me and said, you know ... 'You're gonna be so mad at me

– I’m using again’ and I said ‘Look dear, I don’t care whether you use or whether you don’t, it doesn’t matter to me. Like, just don’t quit trying to quit and that is all I ask, and I love you just as much standing here now as I did when you were first trying to get help’.

The addition of this narrative re-contextualises the ‘dirty snapshot’, reframing it through compassionate, resident-led understanding. The importance of who is speaking about an image when establishing meaning is apparent in this example. One picture can represent multiple realities, and reception of an image is dependent on how meaning is interpreted and communicated.

The assertion of multiple representational realities throws the idea of misrepresentation into flux. This becomes problematic when used in defence of the ‘dirty snapshot’. I suggest an understanding of misrepresentation as any one-dimensional response, omitting or distorting the voices of the individual or group in focus. A definition is needed that bypasses polarised conceptions of ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’ and takes into account a more complex understanding of representation. I suggest that a sense of ownership is crucial to a sense of affirmative representation. The community-led nature of the Hope in Shadows contest enables those involved to enact reclamation of space and place through photography. The focus

group participants actively contrast the images produced with those of the media, and in doing so create a renewed, reclaimed sense of identity. The style of representation offered through the Hope in Shadows contest model invites DTES residents – many of whom live chaotic lives – to represent themselves and their community through a creative mosaic of pictures and text. Rather than creating a linear narrative of a community over ten years, the Hope in Shadows contest, in process and as an archive, offers a fragmented account of multiple truths.

### **Photography and Identity in the DTES**

The focus group discussions pointed to the participants’ recognition of the existence of a link between photography and identity:

Danny: In the Hope in Shadows I did use the photography to define, kinda to define what ... a little bit of what I’m about.

Danny, a first-time entrant in the contest, took the opportunity to show the positive, or what he interpreted as the ‘angelic’ side of his community:

Danny: I’ll tell you what I did, I made some angel wings and I wore them around the Downtown Eastside for a couple of days and I just asked people if they would like to have a picture taken with

the angel wings on and erm I got a really good response, everybody was ... everybody liked it, everybody wanted to wear the wings. And so ... and so I was trying to say like in this bad area there ... there is angels and there could be angels, and there's good ... where, where everybody thinks is maybe not so good, you know?

Danny uses angel wings as props to alter the presence of individuals in his neighbourhood, actively casting the community in a positive light. The home-made angel wings (made using hanger-wire and white paper) are used to create a visual metaphor. Danny uses the wings to challenge a presumed perception of the neighbourhood as 'hell'. Danny's involvement of other community members in his imaginative visual metaphor nurtures a participatory, inclusive culture. His approach works in contrast to the media-made images of the neighbourhood due to his insider status. When asked what photograph Danny felt would represent his self-identity, he chose the picture of himself, wearing the same wings. For Danny, this represented the kind of person he tried to be in the DTES. Through a staged enactment of the angelic, Danny creates or recreates identities for himself and for his community. These identities may be transient – dependent on and created for contrived scenarios. However, when understood as part of the much larger Hope

in Shadows archive, Danny's approach contributes to a legacy of repeat-representation, going some way to secure and make permanent the positive framing of individuals.

Positive understanding and (re) creation of identity was mediated through a recurring theme of 'in the midst of'. Describing 'Eastside Magic' (Washburn 2011), a winning photograph in the contest picturing a woman leaning out of Carnegie Community Centre's window, smelling some flowers, Carl states:

There was kind of a bright spot in a harsh reality and you just stop and smell the roses for a minute – and you go wow – there's somebody's grandmother there, smelling the roses, in amongst all of this ugliness that we sometimes have a tendency to see.

For Carl, the human subject of the photograph and her actions define the 'bright spot'. Carl describes the woman in the picture as 'somebody's grandmother', assigning her a social role that he can identify with. Throughout the focus group discussion, Carl described DTES residents in familial terms – as sons, daughters, aunts and grandmothers. Carl brings individuals closer to himself through these definitions, emphasising the human connections in the community. There seems to be an inclination to contrast the positivity and potential of DTES residents against a more negatively framed



urban landscape. Drawing on the same theme, Laura describes a photograph of herself taken against a graffiti backdrop. She talks about the reaction to the image from community members and individuals in the wider Vancouver area:

I was called beautiful in the photograph in the Downtown Eastside amongst rubble and drugs and grief – but they see beauty, they see me.

The depiction of 'Hope in Shadows' for Carl and for Laura is almost literal. For both participants, the neighbourhood is constructed through positioning something 'good' against something 'bad'. Laura was not the photographer, but the subject of the photograph she discusses. She concentrates on her own visibility and how she is externally perceived. Laura's binary understanding of herself against the DTES backdrop is arguably shaped by the rhetoric of the contest itself. While the DTES residents are positioned as the 'Hope' – a perception that encourages agency in the individual – the perpetual framing of the neighbourhood as negative might enforce a feeling of being trapped by circumstance. This might be recognised as a limitation of the contest, problematising the neighbourhood through framing space and place as undesirable.

While the Hope in Shadows project does not have an explicit agen-

da, it does invite a certain kind of representation. The contest might not have an attached research or policy agenda, but it certainly has its own dictate, locating the neighbourhood as 'in the shadows' by unifying distinct pictures under the broad category of the Hope in Shadows brand. Regardless of photographer intention, once positioned under the Hope in Shadows umbrella, pictures are encouraged to be viewed as depicting the contest theme. The Hope in Shadows contest, by virtue of name alone, influences intention and reception. The potential influence of the contest motivation was taken into account in focus group approach and analysis. Focus groups took place in a separate space, in an openly unaffiliated context (as advertised on event posters and explained to participants) to stimulate as far as possible a genuine, spontaneous dialogue.

### **Urban Photography as Identity Portraiture**

On asking individuals what photograph they would take to represent community identity, the following responses were elicited:

Jack: I would take a picture downstairs in the kitchen – but empty, you know, I – just so because, that's what I do, you know – I'm one of the chefs here ... it's my community.

Carl: I'd think more about an aer-

ial photo from 100 feet above ... probably Carrall and the centre up to Gore from one edge and the Victory Square at another edge and just Hastings and that alleyway – just a long panoramic shot of everything going on.

Jack declared that he would use the same image to represent his personal identity, emphasising the point that the kitchen would be empty. In the second focus group, Sam stated:

I'd take a picture of Chinatown looking out Main Street past the Carnegie and the mountains. Because that's where I came from. It's part of my blood.

Jack, Carl and Sam referenced a photograph of the urban space and place without any people in the frame. The discussion of these 'empty' photographs suggests how urban space and place can become a metaphor for collective and/or self-identity. The choices of pictures without people arguably go some way to provide an imaginative response to the media images that explicitly depict people, often in a negative light and often at their most vulnerable. The 'empty' images simultaneously subvert the binary opposition implied by the Hope in Shadows contest name.

Participants discussed how pictures taken in the Hope in Shadows contest often depicted what had dis-

appeared, marking out a significant absence that could only be understood by others in the neighbourhood who were aware of the meaning, or explained through talking about their images:

Carl: On Main Street I'm so used to sitting at the Wave looking over Vancouver Police Department and ... it disappeared! I don't know how, because I'm there every day and I said to these people 'Where'd the sign go?' and they said 'What do you mean?' and I said 'Well they're finally gone.' The Vancouver police had been leaving there for over a year ... I said 'Their sign's gone' and started taking pictures of this sign being gone.

Picturing the disappeared enables community photography to establish itself as an 'insider' practice. The need for accompanying explanation as to why an image is significant, and what it means, can be empowering for the photographer. The discussion of symbolic urban landscape images seems to imply that DTES residents share a visual language at a community level. The impact of a photograph becomes contingent on and controlled by those who understand its symbolic value, necessitating further involvement of 'insiders' to enable 'outsider' understanding. There is a sense articulated by the focus group participants that urban photography is

intrinsically emotive and associated with individuals and groups regardless of whether people are included in the picture. Photographs of the neighbourhood were discussed in terms of psychological wellbeing, aspirations and personal feelings about the community.

Through repeat-representation, the Hope in Shadows contest becomes a mediator of identity in the neighbourhood. The event asserts a common ground amongst differential service-users, positioning the urban neighbourhood as a shared space that, through the collective act of photography, can symbolise a collective DTES identity. The name of the photography contest invites meaning-making, encouraging individuals to re-think semiotic cues. The 'Hope in Shadows' title encourages individuals to picture something good against something bad, and is taken up by many individuals who participate in the contest – with Danny's angel wings providing an example of this. Carl's picturing of the disappeared does not follow this theme; his photograph is ambiguous to the outsider, it does not explicitly locate a positive or negative image. His picture asserts an ownership of his space and reclamation of meaning that extends beyond any perceived confines of the contest theme. These differential approaches to the contest emphasise the multiple roads to empowerment that community-photography can facilitate.

### **Pictures for Community Advocacy**

The impact of the Hope in Shadows contest on the DTES community presents an argument for the potentiality of participant-led photography for advocacy, demonstrating why Wang et al.'s (2000) model of photovoice can be an example of a democratic, meaningful, policy-oriented approach. The case-study also raises more questions about how photovoice might be developed in future work. The perception of the camera as a powerful tool for related advocacy was explored in the focus groups; gentrification, policing and service-provision were key themes, raised repeatedly. I asked participants how they might use photography to express community issues to policy-makers. Sam immediately discussed the need in the community for a First Nations neighbourhood house – specifically for children and for Elders, to encourage relationships and meet social needs:

I'd take pictures of children interacting with Elders you know – outdoors and indoors – like storytelling and then, then playful activity, nature walks ...

The value of the camera as a tool to express the requirements of a complex community with multiple needs seems clear. Photography can be used to capture the community in action – humanising the meanings of statistical data, eluci-

dating quantitative abstraction.

Carl spoke about a project run by DTES residents, which involves using photography to record questionable policing in the neighbourhood:

I worked on 'Cop Watch' – taking photos of cops jacking people up and just ... we don't get in their way we just take their pictures. We don't ask – we don't care. It's happening on the sidewalk, this man's getting himself busted for something, I mean we just want to make sure he's not getting his arm twisted up around his ass and not getting hauled off to jail for something that's unwarranted ... I try not to get his picture, I try to get a picture of the cops that are ... that are dealing with him, right?

Carl recognises the position of power that the camera puts him in and how this contrasts with the vulnerable position of the individual being arrested. The Hope in Shadows contest itself involves a strict etiquette of consent when taking pictures of people in the community. In Carnegie Community Centre, photographing individuals is banned. It is how the image can be used that becomes contentious, particularly when involving socially excluded individuals. I suggest that in certain circumstances, pictures without people in them might have the desired impact, without the ethical issues that photographing people can involve. Focus group discussion

has indicated how the image of the urban space can convey personal issues through visual metaphor and symbolic meaning, without picturing the subject themselves. This style of photography offers a potential alternative route for visual advocacy.

Images for community advocacy allow the involvement of community members at a grassroots level – enabling individuals to provide the initial catalyst for debate in a language that is arguably far more accessible than the formalised, traditional written rhetoric of policy. Photography can enable individuals to reshape, redefine or reclaim their social reality (Chatman 1996, 195), removing barriers of hierarchical knowledge or perceived social standing. The Hope in Shadows project provides a platform for community access to public representation; Laura states: 'the click of the camera, it changed my life – it got me into places I would never, ever be otherwise. I've met politicians.' Laura's involvement in the community project allowed her access to the public political realm – an area from which low income individuals are so often excluded. I suggest that the Hope in Shadows contest does not simply document spaces and places, but creates visual narratives of the DTES that are meaningful to individuals and to groups in both personal and political ways, and that these visual narratives can be used to influence positive outcomes for the community.

The Hope in Shadows contest

provides a platform for communication with the wider city through the presence of the online archive, city exhibitions and calendar sales. The contest goes some way to give a voice to individuals positioned and/or self-identifying as socially marginalised and to increase visibility on residents' terms. Nevertheless, the community remains excluded, with little evidence of social change as a direct result of the contest and the repeated community representations that it facilitates. The Hope in Shadows project does not promise change or directly challenge policy; in fact the organisers deliberately position it as being itself outside any direct agenda. My aim is to learn from the Hope in Shadows model as a template for future participant-led visual work, with the propensity to challenge exclusionary norms and work towards tangible, social outcomes. To achieve image-based impact outside the DTES, I suggest that the community must not only be represented, but recognised on their own terms by 'significant others' (Mead 1964). I define significant others as the wider Vancouver population, service-providers, policy-makers, and local and national media, as identified by focus group participants.

Collaboration with influential individuals with the ability to affect policy is paramount in enabling resident-led images to create impact and catalyse change. Academic or organisation-based researchers

with links in local or national government can help raise the profile of community projects conceived to tackle local issues. I suggest that photovoice methods can enable participants to create the agenda for relevant advocacy, based on their own understandings of community needs. The model that I suggest for such collaboration draws on Paulo Freire's (2006) dialogic educational paradigm, in which the oppressed individuals are positioned as co-creators of knowledge. In her work on community arts practise, Goldbard (2006) voices her hopes for the outcomes of participatory projects rooted in Freire's pedagogical theory:

That people facing social exclusion, when given the opportunity to express individual truths in the language of their own creative imaginations, will become aware of their common concerns and common capacity to take action in their own interests and may even join together to actualise that awareness ... Second is the wish that gatekeepers and others who wield power will be reached by such expressions, will be moved to respond constructively (Goldbard 2006, 14)

I argue that photography is a medium that can enable the 'experiences which are lived through as thoroughly personal and subjective' and 'problems fit to be inscribed into the public agenda and become mat-

ters of public policy' (Bauman 2000, 78–79) to reconnect. In other words, photography can be a useful tool for elevating C. Wright Mills' notion of 'personal troubles' to the status of 'public issues' (Mills 1959, 8).

### Conclusion

My study has indicated the significant relationship that the camera can reveal between the embodied individual and their sense of place and space – the 'entanglements of the individual and the city' (Lancione 2011). The focus groups in the DTES opened up a forum for meaningful discussion around images taken in and of their neighbourhood. Discussing community images and personal practice (both within and outside of the *Hope in Shadows* contest), participants approached meaning-making in the following ways:

- Through directly countering external definitions.
- Through proactive (re)visualisations of the community.
- Through the creation of a (visual) community language.

Understanding urban photography as personal or collectively conceived visual metaphor can subvert external semiotic coding practices and place the images in the hands of the community, who can explicate relevant intentions and interpretations. This symbolic act allows representation on resident's terms,

nurturing a collective sense of empowerment. Focus group responses indicate how Proshansky's (1978) concept of place-identity can be affirmed through urban photography: connecting the embodied, psychological self to the environment through meaningful images. The place-identities of neighbourhood residents are formed through mutual affiliations with the DTES space and place, creating a common ground for community. Resident-led photography enables individuals to present 'personal troubles' in the context of wider neighbourhood or 'public issues' (Mills 1959) through sharing personal photographs as part of a community project in the public sphere. For DTES residents, however, the relationship with the wider 'public' remains restricted by perceived spatial and emotional boundaries. Focus group participants discussed how they felt abandoned by the Vancouver police and ignored or aestheticised by wider city residents. I suggest that participatory visual methods with a resident-led agenda for advocacy can work towards breaking down barriers between marginalised communities such as the DTES, and 'significant others' (Mead 1964).

Through a discussion of contest images such as 'The Hug' (Elko 2003), focus group participants demonstrated how images can provide the stimulus for normative claims to (multiple) truths. Through the use of angel wings as visual

cues, Danny demonstrated how photography can be used to portray his community in a positive light. Through picturing the disappeared, Carl demonstrated how the DTES community can actively retain a significant role in the explication of symbolic meaning to outside audiences. Through community photography, the Downtown Eastside can be presented as a multi-faceted, complex space. Resident-led representations are at once personal and collective, overlapping, intersecting and running through the veins of the neighbourhood, with the potential energy to inform a wider audience of service providers, urban and social policy officials of their values, issues and aspirations.

David states:

But you know the best way of reaching people in London or Vancouver or Birmingham or Toronto or anywhere else is to educate people – to let people know what the real people of this neighbourhood ... what the real people get up to.

Echoing the sentiment of Freire (2006), I suggest that this education must be dialogical in nature, undertaken with and from the vantage point of excluded communities, encouraging affirmative social presence through the amplification of grassroots voices. I position the camera as a tool to promote a qualitative increase in mutual under-

standing, to picture and make possible social inclusion in the city.

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# Applying Visual Methods in the Study of Place Affiliation, Mobility, and Belonging

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*In this short essay we present a Danish research project called 'Images of the Global Periphery'. Through the use of visual methodologies, the project focuses on belonging and home-making among newcomers, thereby addressing how geographic mobility is implicated in 'everyday belonging' and people's experiences of being 'at home'. The essay argues that a visual approach provides valuable empirical additions to our understanding - and it contributes to a further theorizing - of place affiliation, mobility and belonging in a globalized world. Furthermore, while most previous research on globalization, belonging, and mobility have failed to incorporate gender perspectives, our preliminary empirical findings indicate that gender, marital status, parenthood, job situation and country of origin all matter in developing a sense of belonging. Such positionalities play a role in the attempt to understand the uneven and often contradictory ways in which global processes and local identities come together.*

*Keywords: Gender, Place Affiliation, Mobility, Belonging, Volunteer Employed Photography*

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Based on an empirical study of place perceptions among newcomers (men and women of foreign origin who have settled in North Denmark within the last 2½ years), this essay addresses how geographic mobility is implicated in 'everyday belonging' and people's experiences of being 'at home'. In so doing, we focus on three questions: first, how is belonging visualized among men and women who are mobile across

borders? Second, how is home perceived, constructed and displayed by subjects who are abroad? Third, how are gendered realities made visible in – and perhaps even actively constructed through – the picturing of place affiliation, mobility, and belonging? With these questions we hope to shed light on the correlation between the importance of belonging in everyday life and local areas, on the one hand, and belonging in

national and transnational communities, on the other.

Within the field of sociology today, it is widely assumed that people's sense of belonging and relationships with the place in which they live are being increasingly challenged by global currents. Some argue that the importance of belonging is decreasing and that 'places', due to globalization, have become less important (e.g. Castells 1996, 1997, 1998; Bauman 1998; Giddens 1999; Urry 2000). Others argue the exact opposite, stating that globalization has countervailing consequences on place attachment and identity (e.g. Gustafson 2001; Davids and van Driel 2005). Emphasizing how the places in which people settle down play a key role in relation to their identity, Lee Cuba and David M. Hummon (1993a, 1993b) link the identity question *who am I?* to the questions *where am I?* and, more fundamentally, *where do I belong?* In so doing, they underline the fact that places – like people, objects and activities – play an important role in everyday life, even if the relationship and identification with places occurs on different scales, ranging from the local to the national and the transnational. In spite of the differing views on the importance and influence of globalization on belonging, there seems to be a consensus that the changes of circumstance caused by globalization raise important questions about the character and meaning of places in

relation to everyday life: a question that Per Gustafson (2001) argues must be answered empirically.

In writings on globalization, place, mobility and belonging, often gender has not been a prominent theme. Throughout the years, however, feminist scholars have argued that these processes are profoundly gendered, although in different ways for particular contexts and times. Gender relations both reflect and affect the spatial organization of society, and feminist geographers in particular have tried to shed light upon the spatialized construction of femininity and masculinity (as ideology, materiality and practice). They have convincingly shown that 'spaces and places are experienced differently by different people' (Nelson & Seager 2005, 15) (see also McDowell 1999; Freeman 2001; Fenster 2005; Davids & van Driel 2005). Gender is one salient dimension in these experiences of places and associations of belonging (as are class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and so forth) and therefore, according to this argument, it is essential to consider gender as a facet of geographic mobility in order to fully understand everyday belonging.

### **Visualisations of Everyday Belonging – Between the Local and the Global**

The use of visual methodologies in social research is not new, and in recent years the literature has expanded to represent different ap-

proaches, among which the use of photography is only one method. In terms of photography, the researcher may use pre-existing materials or take his/her own photos, like in Charles S. Suchar's (1988, 2004) studies of city life and urban changes in Chicago and Amsterdam, where photos are combined with ethnographic field works to convey the changes in local communities on micro- and macro levels. Another common practice is for the researcher to enter into cooperation with individuals and/or groups, as we have done, and work with them and/or allow them to gather data alone, while at the same time utilising them as the subject(s) of the study (Garrod 2008; Cherem & Traweek 1977). This is called *volunteer-employed photography* (VEP).

Naturally, while developing our research project, we have been inspired by the experiences of other researchers in using photos. For instance, in tourism research perceptions of cities and landscapes are often the object of study, like in Brian Garrod's (2008) research on different perceptions of the Welsh town Aberystwyth (see also Haldrup & Larsen 2010; Taylor et al. 1996). One specific element we have been inspired by in Garrod's work is his experiences with combining the collection of photos with the use of photo logs. Besides tourism research, we have also been inspired by research on identity and self-esteem: for example Malose Langa (2008)

regarding the construction of masculinity among young men, and Les Back (2007) on the significance of tattoos. Most importantly, we have been inspired by Carey M. Noland (2006) who handed out cameras to school girls asking them to take photos expressing 'who they were' or who 'they were not'.

Using VEP, we have handed out cameras to newcomers in the region together with a fairly open task regarding what to photograph. This approach, we argue, offers valuable empirical contributions to our understanding and theorizing of place affiliation, mobility and belonging in a globalized world. As Caroline Knowles and Paul Sweetman (2004) argue, sociological perspectives can be strengthened by the use of visual strategies 'which capture the particular, the local, the personal and the familiar while suggesting a bigger landscape beyond and challenging us to draw the comparison between the two' (Knowles & Sweetman 2004, 8).

When photography is used as a scientific method, it is precisely in an attempt to capture the unspoken and that which is potentially unseen in everyday life:

The new prominence of visual strategies in social research (...) is about new theoretical and technical possibilities, a re-enchantment among social commentators with the texture of social life, the shifting and fragmented frame-

works of knowledge in which we all operate and a determination to reach beyond words in producing accounts of the social world (Knowles & Sweetman 2004, 2).

Back (2007) has put forward the same argument, pointing out how the most important parts of daily life are often left unspoken, which is why we must turn our attention to 'the realm of embodied social life that operates outside of talk' (Back 2007, 95). He too points to photography as an important methodological tool as '...the quality of the images operates outside of language and the conventions of The Word (...) We have to listen to them with our eyes' (Back 2007, 100).

It may, of course, be questioned as to what extent photography merely *captures*, or rather *constructs*, images. One methodological problem deriving from our approach is that we, to some extent, construct our participants as 'outsiders' simply by contacting them as exemplars of 'newcomers' – a fact that one of the participants also commented on (see picture 1). This may also be regarded as an ethical problem. However, in trying to capture their sense of feeling at home or not, we felt that 'newcomer' was considered a more neutral term than, for example, 'alien' or 'foreign'. Many comments in the photo logs indicate active juxtaposition of North Denmark and the participant's country of origin, potentially exaggerating or constructing differences and similarities that may not otherwise have been felt to be as prominent. Another methodological challenge deriving from VEP concerns the way we have interacted with participants, which in our case has primarily been through cyberspace. Firstly, we advertised through Facebook for volunteers; participants then uploaded photos and comments in the photo log to an online database. This approach is likely to correlate with the fact that most of our participants are highly educated, with 10 out of 25 either holding a PhD degree or studying for one. So while there is diversity in terms of national origin (21 different countries), they are all highly educated. However, this does not nec-



Picture 1 (female, Poland): Those wanting me to participate in the project must think of me as a newcomer.

essarily translate to class position, as 13 are unemployed, and 8 are in temporary jobs.

### **Focusing on Newcomers and using ‘Home’ as a Metaphor for Belonging**

Like Back’s argument that images force us to ‘listen with our eyes’, part of the reasoning behind our methodological approach is that by handing out cameras to newcomers, we may be forced to look at objects and places which might otherwise have escaped our attention. Each of the 25 participants selected for this project had been residing in North Denmark for less than 2½ years. Presumably, this means that the region still feels like a ‘new place’ with which they have not yet become familiar, and for this reason everyday life still offers ‘disruptions’.

Focusing on newcomers and thereby choosing a team of participants who are precisely *not* rooted in one particular locality, we aim to procure images of habits, daily rituals, objects etc which stand out to the participants when they consider their sense of belonging. The fact that the life stories of our participants all involve moving from abroad to the region of North Denmark may contribute to new perspectives on the relationship between the local, national, and transnational when it comes to home-making and developing a sense of belonging. As Jennie Germann Molz puts it, belonging is especially important to

those who are mobile or travelling:

Home is not just a place, but also a process of regular patterns and social connections that may be performed and reiterated even while travelling ... Rather than becoming impossible in the midst of movement, home continues to matter as a physical and emotional site of belonging (Germann Molz 2008, 330).

As part of the research project we not only gave our participants a camera, but also a specific assignment for what to photograph (which is shown in table 1 below and is inspired by Noland 2006), and we asked them to fill out a photo log with comments on each photo (inspired by Garrod 2008).

*Table 1 – Task for participants*

We would like you to take two different kinds of pictures of elements in your everyday life, elements which:

- make you feel at home in the region, or
- make you feel like a newcomer in the region

The pictures can be of anything (e.g. objects, places, buildings or persons) just as long as they say: ‘This makes me feel at home’ or ‘This makes me feel like a newcomer’, and as long as they somehow relate to your sense of living in the region.

In the task for participants, ‘at-homeness’ is used as a metaphor to capture the essence of feelings of belonging. Yet, we are well aware that it can be difficult to put into words what it means to ‘feel at

home' – or to capture it in a photo – since it is an emotion that involves many different aspects, which all contribute to one's identity and understanding of oneself. As Antonio Cristoforetti et al. (2011) write: 'the space of home – experienced in terms of places and relationships, objects and emotions – includes and completes a person's self-image and sense of identity, understood as expression, identification, belonging, power and appropriation' (Cristoforetti et al. 2011, 226). And yet, at-homeness is also marked by physical objects, social habits, technologies, small daily rituals, relations with other people, etc and, indeed, such things can be captured in photos (see also Haldrup and Larsen 2010). The assignment of having to take photos of their everyday sense of feeling at home or not feeling at home might even sharpen the attention of the participants to their local surroundings. Previous experiences with the use of VEP show that informants, when given a camera, seem to be more observing and reflexive (Garrod 2008; Chase, Carlisle and Becker 1993). This notion has been confirmed by our participants, who have reported that when provided with a camera by us, they were forced to reflect on their everyday activities and engagement with their surroundings.

### **An Emergent Visual Landscape of Belonging**

We asked each photographer to

take at least 12 pictures. However, we received 473 photos in total, as several participants delivered more than 12, and all completed the task. The photos and their adjacent comments from the photo log were then stored in Nvivo (a qualitative data analysis software), where we coded them depending both on what they illustrated and what the participant noted in his/her comments. Looking at the categories that emerged from this coding process, it is clearly the case that a number of categories refer to physical surroundings, such as 'buildings', 'city-spaces' or 'nature'. However, some categories also relate to far less tangible aspects of place affiliation and belonging, such as the categories 'job opportunities and working culture', 'perceptions of Danish mentality' and 'meeting the welfare state'. In comparison to previous literature, at this early stage of our analyses we already detect a pattern similar to that identified by Judith Sixsmith (1986) – namely 'personal, social and physical' – as well as Per Gustafson's (2001) model encompassing 'self, others and environment', with various intermediary positions between these poles. By visualizing their everyday belonging in the region of North Denmark through the photos, our participants have outlined a landscape of belonging which, at the abstract level, corresponds with findings from the separate interview-based studies by Sixsmith and Gustafson: a fact which seems both



theoretically intriguing and methodologically reassuring. Turning to the level of detail, however, a much richer picture emerges, which opens up interpretations of how one's gender, family situation, history of migration etc may influence one's everyday sense of belonging.

According to Lynne C. Manzo (2003), research on place affiliation and belonging has tended to phrase this as rootedness and comfort 'and has not explored the role of negative/ambivalent feelings and experiences as fully' (Manzo 2003, 48). Yet, it appears from our findings that the experience of feeling at home need not be connected only to something positive. It can also concern negative experiences in one's home country – such as when one participant photographed heavy industry on the harbour front (see picture 2), commenting that this was a familiar scenario. However, the subject believed that more needed to be done to combat pollution in this new setting, hence the image evoked negative aspects of his country of origin. Similarly, the feeling of being a newcomer can be connected both to something exciting/interesting, but also to more negative experiences. Two new experiences which many participants commented on in a positive way were the existence of a 'biking culture' in North Denmark, and the fact that many reported feeling safe and secure when moving about in public space (see picture 3). But there are also examples of



Picture 2 (male, Bangladesh): Although I come from a developing country, our industrial exhaust system is not so developed. Here I see, the exhaust is so white.



Picture 3 (male, India): Late night walk through this path: I was afraid I would be robbed if I went alone. Nothing happened, even though it was late night. I feel very safe living and travelling in North Denmark.

new and negative experiences: for example, photos of police stations and other bureaucratic institutions of the Danish welfare state, which are in some instances perceived as control mechanisms designed to monitor foreigners' compliance with the rules and regulations of Danish society in particular, and transnational mobility in general. Hence, reminding our participants of their status as non-citizens, and underlining the need to draw participants' nationality into the analysis in intersection with gender, class, age, etc.

As already noted, there is little previous research on place af-

filiation, belonging and mobility that takes on a gender perspective. Having yet to complete our analysis of the entire dataset, we do, however, see evidence that gender and gender relations may play a role. Like Tovi Fenster (2005), we thus find that an important dimension of everyday belonging is that it evolves through men's and women's spatial understanding of their surroundings. Our findings differ, however, regarding the significance of parenthood. Fenster concludes that for the women in her study, 'their role as mothers is one of the significant aspects of their embodied knowledge as related to the notion of belonging' while 'the men, on the other hand, didn't mention their fatherhood as a significant indicator' (Fenster 2005, 244). In contrast to Fenster's findings, fatherhood as well as motherhood seem to be a significant dimension in the experience of belonging for our participants. For example, several participants took pictures of the local maternity ward, commenting both on the involvement of fathers at childbirth, the possibilities for parental leave and obtaining a work-life balance, and the extent of the social security system in general (see picture 4). Others provided comments on facilities for children in the urban environment and the involvement of fathers in childrearing.

Yet, there were also other ways in which gender emerged as a key factor, e.g. some of our photographers



Picture 4 (male, India): Being a newcomer, I am so surprised reading the rules and regulations regarding children like paternity leave for husbands, special allowances by the municipality etc. The importance Danes give to their family really astonished me.

commented on the exposure of female bodies in public space. This included a photo of a down-town strip club clearly advertizing in the street, a photo of a visibly pregnant bride in front of the registrar's office and photos of mannequins in lingerie-shops (see picture 5) – in several cases, participants wrote in the photo log that such images would have been an unthinkable scenario in their country of origin.



Picture (male, Hungary): It makes me feel like a newcomer, that dummies suggest a sexual content to the public. That could never happen in my home country.

### Concluding Remarks

We stand at the threshold of what promises to be an exciting analytic endeavor, the contours of which are

only beginning to emerge from our visual material. Initially, the photos seem to verify that using visual methodologies is rewarding in the study of place affiliation, mobility, and belonging. Sarah Pink (2012) argues that it is important for the scholar of everyday life not simply to cut out flat slices of it; 'Rather, he or she should find his or her way through this unevenness, following those whose lives, actions and things she or he seeks to understand' (Pink 2012, 34). As a consequence of such considerations, Pink advocates 'a shift away from semiotic analysis towards analysing photographs and other representations through a theory of multisensoriality and place [which] offers an alternative route to knowledge' (Pink 2012, 35).

The application of visual methods in our study of place affiliation, mobility, and belonging seems, so far, to have offered an alternative route to insights into how globally mobile men and women perceive, construct and display their sense of belonging. By employing participants who are known to be mobile across national borders, we argue that we are more than able to suggest 'a bigger landscape beyond' the local (Knowles and Sweetman 2004, 8). Also, the photos open up new ways of conceptualizing the gendered social realities of globalization, in addition to conceptualizations of place affiliation, mobility, and belonging.

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# Photographic Postcards as Research Tools: The ‘Postcards from the Cut’ Study

Zoë K. Millman

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*This paper discusses the development and outcomes of a research methodology employing photographic postcards as remote, performative-narrative research tools to elicit and record written responses to the regenerated central canal landscape in Birmingham, UK. The canal landscape was chosen as the research formed part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award between Birmingham Institute of Art and Design and British Waterways (renamed The Canal and River Trust since July 2012), entitled ‘Landscape Narratives and the Construction of Meaning in the Contemporary Urban Canal-scape’ (2012). A postcard featuring an instruction and six images of the canal landscape arranged in a grid format was produced, distributed and returned during 2010. The 160 responses from an ethnically, age and gender-diverse group highlight the multiplicity of meanings and landscape preferences converging on the contemporary canal-scape. The returned narratives include instances of emplaced memories and associations. Data suggest this is an effective means to elicit and record individuals’ landscape perceptions where the potential for researcher-participant interaction may be limited, for instance by a lack of time or accessibility.*

*Keywords: Landscape, Narratives, Perception, Canals, Photography*

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## Introduction

In 2010, while I was undertaking research for my PhD entitled ‘Landscape Narratives and the Construction of Meaning in the Contemporary Urban Canal-scape’ (2012)<sup>1</sup>, I produced a photographic postcard of the central Birmingham canal landscape for distribution amongst the city’s residents. The wider research was an exploration of the ways in which individuals

perceive, and construct personal meaning around, the canal landscape (which has undergone large-scale regeneration since the 1990s), using ethno-phenomenological<sup>2</sup> methods with individuals and small groups, and using the Grounded Theory<sup>3</sup> approach to simultaneous data collection and textual analysis (Pink 2009; Pink et al. 2010, Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2006). The wider research focused on the

performative act of walking with the elicitation of narratives collected in the canal landscape from lone individuals ('self-narrated walking'), researcher-participant interviews ('walking-and-talking') and small groups, all recorded using digital audio recorders (Tolia-Kelly 2007; Pink 2007). The resultant narratives were suggestive of the link between the construction of individuals' place identities, multi-modal sensory perception (i.e. holistic, involving all the senses) and the instigation of memory-recall and memory emplacement (Tuan 1974; Bender 1993; Pink 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Thoma 2006; Bales 2001). The narratives my usual methodology produced were dense with personal meanings, landscape preferences, musings and significant memories of this and other 'associated' landscapes. The 'Postcards from the Cut' study was to be slightly different to the methods I usually employed: a remote study on a larger scale, providing a greater number of individual narratives than would be possible using my walking methodologies. If the types of narratives produced resembled the earlier walking narratives in terms of iconic landscape components, references to sensory perception, memories and musing, this would indicate that the instigation of these is not dependent on a physical experience of the landscape. This suggests that future research in landscape perceptions may be undertaken remotely, there-

fore accessing more participants.

The aim of the postcard was to elicit a written response by presenting respondents with a series of images, one of which they would choose, explaining their reasons (Fig. 1). I chose to present people with photographic images, rather than requesting they take their own as previous requests for open responses from research participants had resulted in low response rates and requests for clarification. Owing to the limitations of the postcard format (i.e. its limited space and the absence of a researcher to clarify instructions), the open response method was changed to a specific instruction to mitigate the effect of confusion on the response rate.

With the exception of one image, the photographs were my own, taken during walks to emphasise the common pedestrian experience of the canals.

The postcard method encourages a choice without demanding physical presence in the landscape, that is, respondents were not required to travel to the canal to make their photographic choice, which is contingent on the limitations of time, weather and comfort. Respondents were merely presented with a range of options and asked to make a choice, their rationales entirely dependent on their own experiences and imaginations. The results suggest that although image choices may be partially based on a subjective aesthetic, individuals' personal

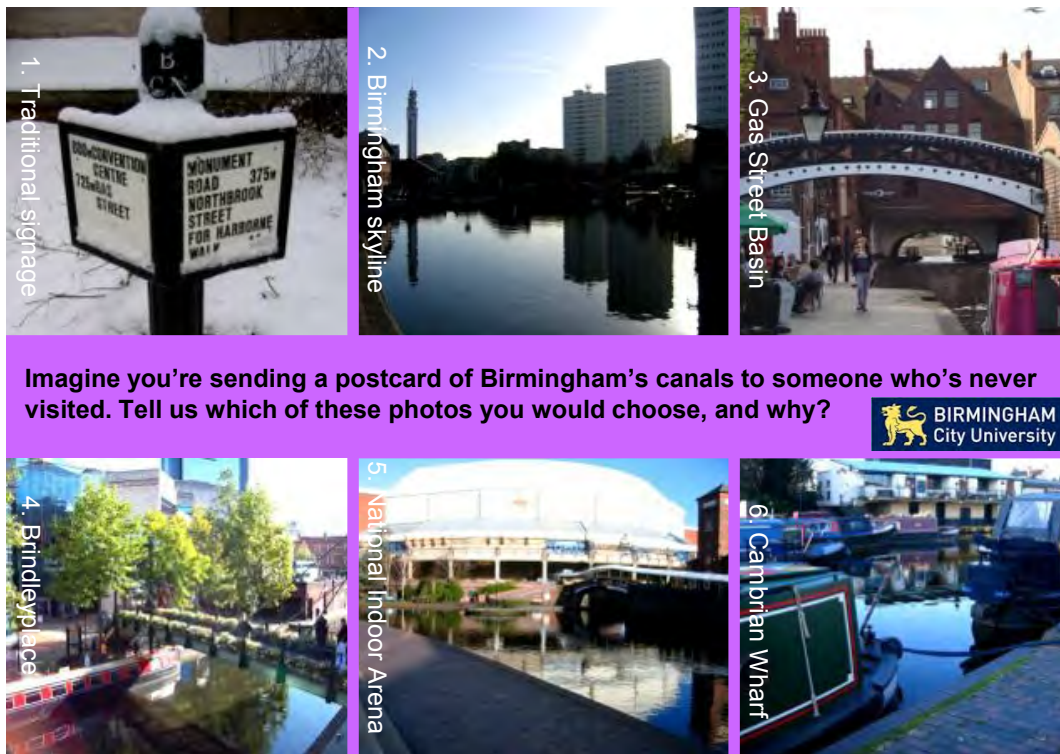


Fig. 1: The *Postcards from the Cut* postcard. Images 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 are the author's own. Image 4 courtesy of Ben Rose. Images are referred to within this paper as below:

- 'Image 1' or '(1)' = 'Traditional signage'
- 'Image 2' or '(2)' = 'Birmingham skyline'
- 'Image 3' or '(3)' = 'Gas Street Basin'
- 'Image 4' or '(4)' = 'Brindleyplace'
- 'Image 5' or '(5)' = 'National Indoor Arena'
- 'Image 6' or '(6)' = 'Cambrian Wharf'

associations and memories instigated through viewing are also implicated in their choice, evidenced in the responses referring to the recollection of memories as part of the rationalisation process.

The study was developed as a method of obtaining a large number of written landscape responses to visual stimuli, without the use of the questionnaire format. The postcard, measuring 10.4 x 14.7 cm, features six photographic images

of Birmingham's central canal landscape arranged in a grid. The postcard also included the instruction: *'Imagine you're sending a postcard of Birmingham's canals to someone who's never visited. Tell us which of these photos you would choose, and why?'* Participants were invited to respond to the instruction anonymously and also provide their age, gender and ethnicity. The study yielded 160 written responses over a two-month study period showing



individuals' preferences for certain views and the reasons for their choices. The limitations were chiefly logistical, relating to dissemination and return, but by taking a network-based approach the postcards reached, and were returned by, an ethnically diverse audience of male and female city residents, ranging in age from 11 to 83.

This study was based on the notion that landscape identity is subjective, personal, open to bias and multiple understandings, and supplemented by memories and associations. '[The landscape] is neither something seen, nor a way of seeing, but rather the materialities and sensibilities with which we see' (Wylie 2005, 243), that is, the landscape is not immutable or universal, rather it is the result of the way we each see, informed by our individual experiences and identities. In short, there are as many landscape identities as there are individuals to construct them, making the act of meaning-making a producer-oriented one by placing the onus on the perceiving individual rather than in the intrinsic characteristics of the landscape. The findings suggest that the landscape is not perceived in a common universal way, but rather in terms of multiplicities of meanings which are the result of multi-modal sensory experiences, often including memories (Pink 2009; Kaplan and Kaplan 1989). This means that the canal landscape, as with any other landscape, is polysemic, with different

meanings projected onto it by its inhabitants. The polysemic nature of the landscape is evidenced through the sheer volume of different meanings attributed to the landscape by different people; if landscapes are universally experienced and understood, then each of the respondents would have expressed the same responses.

### **Methodology**

'Postcards from the Cut' was inspired by two other landscape postcard studies; Ian Biggs and Sarah Blowen's 2009 study<sup>4</sup> and Red Kite Environment's consultation of children regarding the regeneration of Stourport-on-Severn Basins<sup>5</sup>. At Stourport children were asked to draw a picture of Stourport's canal landscape in order to uncover the landscape components they regarded as most iconic of their experiences of the town. The resulting images of nearby Shipley's Amusement Park – the water, boats and trees – are, for the children, Stourport's iconic landscape components, and it was this aspect of the consultation's objective that was borrowed for this research. Understanding the specific landscape components participants consider iconic is one aspect in uncovering the myriad perceptions of the canal-scape, as the meanings and associations linked to those iconic components become the meanings and associations linked with participants' understanding of the landscape itself.

The original idea for the 'Postcards from the Cut' study was to allow respondents to reflect on their perceptions of the landscape by extending an invitation for open responses to the images in any format; people were to 'tell me something' in the form of a story, an opinion, or an image. However, I changed my approach for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was thought appropriate to mitigate the possible effects of participants' confusion, or embarrassment at their creative abilities, by setting a question with a series of visual options. Thus, I chose to place parameters on the exercise by asking participants to choose an image because previous requests for open responses (including drawings, photography and text) had resulted in low response rates and requests for clarification. Secondly, it was important that participants shared a written rationale, and I anticipated that some would let their own images 'speak for themselves' in an open response, thereby removing the written narratives that I was keen to access. Finally, making an open response is more demanding of participants' time and energy, so they are less likely to participate.

By providing respondents with a common scenario – choosing a postcard – they are encouraged to perform a familiar and hopefully enjoyable action, as the likelihood is that respondents will have experience of choosing and sending postcards to represent their holiday landscapes. The scenario of send-

ing the postcard to '*someone who's never visited*' Birmingham's canals is also familiar as many respondents will have visited holiday destinations which their families and friends have not. On the reverse of the postcard respondents were asked to provide three additional pieces of personal information: their age, gender and ethnicity. The small size of the postcard and the desire to allow respondents to express their individuality negated the use of a 'tick-box' method. Rather than placing themselves within imposed categories of gender, ethnicity and age, space was provided for respondents to choose their own identifiers, although without further interaction with the anonymous respondents, any additional data comparisons were impossible (Spivak and Gunew 1994; Peach 2006; Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006; Charmaz 2006).

The postcard method is narrative in that respondents share written responses based on personal experience and opinion. Many respondents included stories about their experiences of the canal landscape, while others used the postcard's instructional scenario to incorporate characters and their motives (e.g. '... would cause a lot of attraction to the people who receive this postcard' (British Pakistani Male, 17, (2)) and 'anyone seeing it for the first time would be intrigued to study it more carefully' (English Male, 73, (3)).

The methodology is also performative in that respondents take part in a one-time-only event, incor-

porating the ritual actions of choosing and writing, then returning the postcard (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008). It is hoped that these actions mimic some of the familiar feelings of sending a postcard, such as the sharing of information, experiences and observations with an absent friend or relative, but also the desire to write something succinct and meaningful. The postcard's design intentionally mimics the commonly seen postcards of canal views showing four or six annotated images of an area. The commemorative aspect of the methodology is intrinsic in the souvenir status of postcards, the photographic images they portray and the messages they hold; postcards are evidence of an individual's presence in a place in the same way that photographs are (Kuhn 2007). Postcards are a complex form of memento because they are not kept by the individual as a holiday photograph might be, but are imbued with memories of noteworthy experiences and sent to an absent other who can only imagine the experiences written about. Postcards, then, are used to recall and record memories which are then shared through the sending of the postcard. They are discursive tools in that they allow the sender to recall experiences, thereby instigating a type of conversation between the past and present self as all memories do (Kuhn 2007; Thoma 2006), but the unsolicited and unanswered nature of postcards renders any dialogue with the recipi-

ent unlikely. Research postcards are a remote method for eliciting landscape responses, but they are no less performative and successful than methods which involve a physical presence in the landscape. For example, respondents used the postcards to share their narratives, demonstrate diversity of perception, muse and recall memories as they did in response to the physical landscape during my other walking narrative studies. Performative acts need not be constrained to movement through physical landscapes; photography and 'photographic memories [are part of] a performative oral tradition' (Kuhn 2007, 285). Annette Kuhn uses photographs to elicit biographical narratives, highlighting the 'discursive' nature of memories, in that we are compelled to share our memories with others upon viewing a photograph (Kuhn 2007, 283).

### **Timing and Distribution**

The postcards were distributed between March and May 2010, with a return deadline of mid-June 2010. I explored the potential of various methods for disseminating and returning postcards, but concluded that to take a 'contingent' approach and use existing networks of contacts would remove any complications such as the payment of postage and nominating a secure post-box. The postcards were distributed to potential respondents via existing contacts from groups and organisations, and on one occasion,

via a mail-drop through post-boxes in a canal-side residential building. Completed postcards were returned via contacts or, as in the case of the residential building, through the researcher's post-box. Postcards were also distributed amongst family, friends and colleagues to distribute amongst their own networks. This method is reliant on others' cooperation and dependent on existing networks for dissemination. By using the method of distribution via contacts, the postcards reached a diverse range of people resident or working in the Birmingham area.

### **Ethical issues**

The postcards were completed anonymously to prevent identification of the participants. To further prevent identification of participants, the majority of postcards were given to a series of contacts for distribution via their own networks. The contacts themselves were not required to complete postcards; however, in the event that any contact did complete a postcard, the anonymous nature of the process would prevent identification. Other postcards were hand-delivered to anonymous post-boxes in a residential canal-side building, and returned to the researcher's post-box.

### **Image Rationale**

Choosing images for the final postcard design necessitated rationalisation of the available images and required an understanding of the di-

versity of the local canal landscape. As this study formed part of PhD research on pedestrian experiences and perceptions of the canal landscape, the postcard needed to portray the views commonly seen from towpaths and bridges – places that are accessible to pedestrians and consequently views that are likely to be experienced by visitors. It was important that the images conveyed a sense of the diversity of the canal landscape in terms of geographical location, viewpoint and content to appeal to a wide range of individuals' 'landscape identities', that is, the identities which individuals attribute to the landscape, imbued with personal significance. The images represent six places along the canal corridor and some of the images are potentially more recognisable than others e.g. Gas Street Basin and the National Indoor Arena. Including unusual views of some of the (locally) well-known places was a conscious choice, made with respondents' comments in mind. Indeed, some respondents commented on the 'poor' views represented in the images of Gas Street Basin (3) and Brindleyplace (4), on the basis that they did not portray the full potential of the area.

The postcard images included a diversity of viewpoints within the confines of pedestrian experience, including a view from an elevated position, views along and across towpaths and water, expansive views of the horizon and intimate views of

canal details. Ensuring diversity of content was partly achieved through including a range of geographical locations and some unusual views of well-known places; however, the constant of the water and the common canal landscape components of boats, bridges and tunnels made representing diversity of content more challenging. Some images portray modern components, others convey a sense of 'heritage', and some include identifiable local landmarks, while others are less easily locatable. In order to limit the recurrence of common canal components, boats and bridges each appear in three of the six images, water in five images and tunnels in only one image. It was anticipated that the universality of those common canal components would be evident in the respondents' choices and comments, and divergences from these components would highlight the diversity of landscape identities converging on the canal landscape.

The arrangement of the images on the postcard was as much the result of necessity as aesthetic choice. My intention was to produce a series of linked but diverse images, none of which jarred but rather invited further consideration. I endeavoured to present the images fairly, making them equally sized and placed to avoid competition with each other. To avoid jarring, the 'sunnier' images and those with deep shadows and reflections were evenly dispersed.

Images with similar depths of horizon were separated to avoid continuation of sightlines. The need to keep printing costs low necessitated a small, but reasonably sized format with which respondents would be familiar from previous experiences of using postcards (10.4 x 14.7 cm). Some images were cropped and borders were placed around each image to distinguish them. During the process of cropping and arranging images on the postcard, some compositional compromises were made, so that photographs which were initially striking when fully-framed were cropped to portray only their most salient components. For example, the image of the towpath signpost (image 1) was a portrait-format photograph depicting the entire signpost surrounded with snow and winter twigs and far more of the brick wall than can be seen in the final postcard image. The resulting compromise may have altered the outcome of respondents' choices, but their choices despite the compromise are entirely valid, their comments evidence of their rationales and the diversity of meaning surrounding the canal landscape.

## **The Responses**

### **The Diversity of the Respondents**

I asked respondents to include their age on the reverse of the postcard, rather than create potentially arbitrary age-range groupings. The majority of postcard respondents

included their exact age, while only twenty individuals (12.5%) chose not to share that information. The recorded age range of respondents was 11 to 83, and respondents were later grouped by decade during analysis (e.g. 20+). Response rates were low amongst those who recorded their age as over 60; however 15 of the 20 respondents who did not record their age were sourced through a contact at the local canal society. If the recorded ages of the remaining canal society respondents are indicative of a commonality in age, the ages of those 15 respondents were likely to be between 50 and 70 years of age.

The postcards asked respondents to include their 'gender', as opposed to their 'sex', since 'gender' refers to a more inclusive socio-cultural understanding of roles, therefore allowing individuals to identify themselves using their own terminology. Over half (56.25%/90 individuals) of respondents listed themselves as 'female', 42.5% (68 individuals) listed themselves as 'male' and 1.25% (2 individuals) did not answer.

Respondents were asked to self-describe their ethnicity to enable them to use terms they felt were representative of how they perceived themselves, rather than choosing a potentially reductive category from a list (Holzworth and Gauntlett 2006). The resulting information highlights the diversity and individuality of the minds that conceived and shared it. Responses included such terms as

'Black'; 'Arab/Yemen mixed'; 'White Anglo Saxon'; and 'British'. These responses make comparisons and categorisations problematic within a quantitative study, but for the purposes of the wider qualitative PhD research such individualistic responses support the research outcomes: namely that there are diverse landscape identities converging on the contemporary urban canal landscape. This diversity is attributable to myriad influences and not merely ethnic identity. Owing to the limitations of the information, the additional information provided by respondents must be taken at face value (Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006). 45% of respondents consider themselves 'British', which gives no indication of ethnic background, and may include those born in Britain and those who were born elsewhere but who are British citizens. Over 21% of respondents consider themselves in terms of other location-related ethnicities for example 'Indian', 'African' and 'Latvian', which have been termed 'non-British', although these respondents may have been born in Britain. Almost 17% of respondents consider themselves in terms of colour, making grouping with the other respondents difficult e.g. some used 'White', 'Black' and 'Mixed'. Almost 17% of respondents did not record their ethnicity.

### **The Diversity of the Responses**

The postcard images elicited a variety of anticipated and unanticipated responses suggestive of the

diversity of landscape identities converging on the canal. Many of the respondents' comments fall into themes despite the inevitable differences between respondents' vocabularies. Therefore certain responses are grouped together, as with 'sunshine' and 'summer' or 'cafe culture' and 'continental', since they are indicative of related ideas. By examining the themes, it is possible to gain both an overview of the perceptions relating to each postcard image and the commonality of these perceptions amongst respondents, as some themes are more frequently recognised than others. For example, the most popular theme relating to the image of Gas Street Basin was that of 'heritage' which was highlighted in 24 responses, while the theme 'modernity' was highlighted only once in relation to this image.

Many respondents included storytelling, or narrative scenarios, in their responses as evidence of their reasoning. These narrative scenarios tended to be presented in the form of memories and musings. Musings tended to be either speculative, where the respondent may suggest that an area would provide tourist attractions or activities, or historical, where a respondent may muse on how the canal would have functioned in the past. As with memories, musings are influenced by the respondent's personal experiences and outlook in the same way that any response would be.

Memories are evidence of personal experiences and the inclusion

of these indicates a deep engagement with the visual stimulus of an image as they highlight the power of an image to trigger a recollection of physical experiences of a place. Memory-based narratives can be divided into those relating specifically to the canal landscape, and those relating to other landscape experiences. In both instances the visual stimulus of the postcard image is strong enough to elicit associations which the respondent feels are important enough to share in writing. For example, two respondents wrote: 'I remember these canals when they were rubbish tips' (White British Female, 82 (3)), and 'Born in Hockley, Birmingham and knew Gas Street before it was modernised. It is much better now ...' (Female, 70 (3)).

Musings are statements or questions indicative of a combination of knowledge and deduction based on previous experiences. Speculative musings relate to anticipations or expectations of the landscape i.e. things that a person could do or see such as: 'an inviting scene where you can enjoy the tranquillity of the canal within close proximity of the buzz of the city' (English White Female, 59 (4)). Historical musings relate to ideas about the landscape of the past i.e. things that a person would have done or seen in the past such as: 'it conjures up the atmosphere of the canals when they were first used more than a 100 years ago' (Female, (3)). In both cases the narrative relates to the 'not-present'.

Some narrative scenarios combined both memories and musing as with this response: '[I] regularly walk along. Inner city living, not tourism' (White Female, 30 (3)). This statement suggests a memory of walking along the canal and also implies future walking – evidence of current landscape usage. Similarly, this response – 'Because the thing I like the most is sitting by the canal with a drink in the sunshine' (White British Female, 25 (4)) – indicates past landscape usage combined with the intention to continue the activity.

### Image Preferences

The six postcard images elicited a variety of responses indicative of the diversity of the perceptions relating to these images, and by extension, to the canal landscape they represent. It was anticipated some images would be chosen more often than others; however, the overwhelming majority choice in favour of two of the images was unanticipated. The majority of respondents followed the instruction to choose one image, but 14 individuals chose two or more images from the postcard, generally on the basis that a single image alone was an insufficient representation of the canal landscape. For the respondents who made a single image choice (as opposed to those who chose numerous images), the images of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace were by far the most preferred im-

ages on the postcard and received a combined value of almost 80% of the vote. The respondents who chose multiple images favoured these two images equally. 10 of these 14 respondents considered the images of Brindleyplace and Gas Street Basin inseparable representations of the canal landscape in Birmingham: '... show two very different aspects of the present canal. 3 shows the old more original site ... 4 shows the modern aspect of the canal' (White British Female, 60 (3) and (4))

The common themes and instances of storytelling returned by respondents in relation to the images of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace suggest a tendency towards the perception of the canal landscape as a complex and multi-functional urban green-space that offers opportunities for leisure, entertainment and the consideration of heritage in the form of buildings and towpath furniture. In light of the overwhelming response in favour of these images, it would be tempting to overlook the validity of the respondents who favoured the other images on the postcard. Over 20% of the respondents did not choose either of these two images; approximately one in five people perceive the canal landscape differently to the majority view, a potentially substantial number of individuals across the wider population. The most common themes taken from the responses to the four least



popular images on the postcard focused on the ideas of traditionalism (1), the city (2), the presence and effects of water (5), and boating (6). While these themes are not unusual in terms of the canal landscape, they suggest the absence of perceptions of heritage value, leisure and green-space, which are all important aspects of the current branding of Brindleyplace and the surrounding area by organisations such as Marketing Birmingham, Birmingham City Council, Argent and British Waterways.

### **Preferences by Gender, Age and Ethnicity**

The three pieces of additional data requested on the reverse of the postcard were included on the basis that they may uncover significant trends; however the focus of the study remained on the content of the written responses. The results suggest that males and females were fairly evenly represented in their preference for the image of Gas Street Basin; approximately two in every five respondents preferred this image, regardless of gender. The image of Brindleyplace was almost as popular with a preference ratio of around 1.5 in every five people.

The available data show that the images of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace were the most popular across all the age groups, except for the 10+ age group who preferred the images of Brindleyplace (for its

greenery, general attractiveness and sunshine) and the National Indoor Arena (for the quality of light and reflections). The data suggest that images 3 and 4 are universally popular, with only slight variations in popularity between the groupings assigned post-facto; however, the variety of self-identified ethnic groupings recorded on the postcards renders comparisons and trending impossible within the confines of this relatively small-scale study.

### **Discussion**

Certain visual components within the urban canal-scape were commonly highlighted by the respondents in the 'Postcards from the Cut' study. These included images of water, which was the most commonly cited, followed by narrow boats and bridges or tunnels, and these common components are generally supported in the narratives taken from the wider PhD research. The scenario was complicated by the knowledge of the respondents' residency in Birmingham. As residents, respondents may have wanted to portray a positive representation of their city, and for some respondents this caused a dichotomy; they personally preferred one image, but chose another as the best representation of the area. This would support the notion that respondents do not necessarily choose the image they prefer aesthetically, but rather consider the images' components and poten-

tial connotations before making a rationalised choice and explaining that choice. The instruction on the postcard was carefully worded not to suggest who the recipient might be, other than '*someone who's never visited*'. Some respondents created an imagined narrative around the postcard by assuming a recipient (for instance, one individual chose an American pen friend), and by making image choices either on the basis that the recipient will be visiting or that the postcard should be sent to encourage a visit. In such cases, the image chosen was generally done so for the inclusion of certain visual components: components which then become the iconic images of the canal landscape for both the respondent and the (imaginary) recipient.

Some respondents' narratives were purely personal recollections of their own experiences of using the canal landscape, generally for leisure purposes, with outdoor dining during the summer months being a popular memory. This suggests that in addition to iconic visual components, there are common themes of interaction with leisure and the pleasure of a beautiful scene being particularly important. Some responses suggest an inability or unwillingness to consider the potential for other perceptions relating to a place, for example by referring to the 'true' meaning of the canal landscape or a 'real' representation of the city e.g. 'truest and nicest rep-

resentation ... especially contrast of old barge and quite modern ICC' (White UK Female, 33 (4)). Some of the respondents shared their disappointment at the content of the images and some suggested other views available that included the aspects they most associate with the canal-scape in that location. As one respondent stated: 'It is not perfect in representing what it should but it is the only picture which shows that the canalway encourages "life"' (Black Caribbean Female, 44 (3)).

This made their responses and the method no less valid, but it would be interesting to attempt a similar investigation using respondents' own photographs in an 'open response'; as discussed earlier, this was considered but rejected for this study, on the basis of the low response rate experienced in calls for open responses in previous studies within the wider research. Whilst choosing the images for the postcard, I made a number of hypotheses derived from data from earlier studies within the PhD research and interviews with research participants. From previous interaction with participants, I hypothesised that respondents would find image 1 of traditional signage pleasing because of the presence of snow, but that owing to the lack of water, i.e. the main focal point of a canal landscape, it would not be a popular choice. Around 5%, or 8 respondents, chose this image, making it one of the least popular images on the postcard.

Respondents referred to this image in terms of its 'beauty' and this was chiefly related to the presence of the snow. Contrary to my hypothesis, respondents did not mention the lack of water and they found the lack of buildings positive. The notion of 'tradition' was commonly elicited by this image, but respondents did not make the cause of this clear, suggesting that the printed title of the image prompted some respondents to make the association with 'tradition'. Rather than invalidating their responses, this outcome suggests that for these respondents, the idea of traditionalism is a fundamental aspect of the canal landscape, whether or not components which signify traditionalism were visible in the image.

Image 2 entitled '*Birmingham skyline*' was chosen by around 7%, or 10 respondents, and a further two respondents included this image in a multiple-choice response. I hypothesised that respondents would respond positively to the presence of water, blue sky and reflections owing to their connotations of sunny days, but the negative connotations of tower block housing were thought likely to diminish the popularity of this image. I anticipated that respondents would strongly associate this image with Birmingham owing to the presence of the local landmark British Telecom building (or the 'BT Tower'), leading them to identify this as their preferred choice. Respondents chose this image for

its composition, connotations of 'the city' and its beauty, which was chiefly related to the presence of the water and the reflections therein. The perception of 'beautiful natural scenery' (Iraqi male, 18 (2)) in this image was surprising since it lacked components such as trees, plants and animals, suggesting that the water itself elicited these associations.

I anticipated that image 3 of Gas Street Basin would be popular amongst older respondents in particular, based on previous interactions with participants: that they would positively associate this image with the heritage value of the area, would comment on the presence of the iron bridge, and would share heritage-based memories and musings of the associated landscape. As the image chosen by almost 45% of respondents, this image was the most popular on the postcard. Respondents favoured this image for its associations with heritage, including the bridge, but also for its associations with leisure and the 'balance' between modernity and tradition; many of the memories and musings elicited by this image were complex, supporting the common idea of the juxtaposition between the pre-development and post-development canal. Contrary to my hypothesis this image was preferred by a wider range of age-groups; it was most popular with respondents over the age of thirty.

I hypothesised that the image entitled '*Brindleyplace*' (4) would be

favoured for its composition, sunny aspect, and specific landscape components such as greenery and the narrow boat, as these components were often identified as iconic of the canal landscape by participants in my previous studies. I anticipated that the title of the image would elicit recollections of summer dining in the nearby restaurants, but that this connotation, combined with that of modern architecture within an historic landscape, would be viewed negatively. This image was the second most popular as it was preferred by around 35% of respondents. Responses commonly referred to the leisure aspects of the area and although it elicited as many recollections as *'Gas Street Basin'*, the majority of the narrative musings it elicited were speculative, relating to the opportunities for leisure and relaxation in the area.

Favoured by around 5% of respondents, the image of the National Indoor Arena (NIA) (5) was one of the least popular images, as I anticipated owing to the architecture of the building which is generally disliked locally. I anticipated that respondents' comments would focus on the juxtaposition between the NIA building and the adjacent older pub, set against the still water, but this was not the case; rather, those who favoured this image generally did so on the basis of the modernity of the iconic NIA. Respondents also favoured this image for the reflectivity of the water and they liked the

juxtaposition between the 'soothing' (Indian female, 21 (5)) water and associations with 'the city'.

As anticipated, image 6 of Cambrian Wharf was the least popular image on the postcard (around 4%, or 6 respondents). I hypothesised that this image would be unpopular owing to the presence of deep shadows, because a prior study suggested participants perceived canal water in shade as 'polluted' and the same water in sunlight as 'clean'. The few respondents who reacted positively to this image referred to boating and the canal water, as with 'the best canal-themed picture' (White British male, 50 (6)), suggesting that for these respondents the historic functionalism of the canal is important.

The popularity of the images of Gas Street Basin (3) and Brindleyplace (4) above all other images is a striking result of this study; around 80% of respondents chose one or the other, with some respondents finding these images so inseparable that they chose both. The common perceptions and instances of storytelling returned by respondents identify a tendency to regard the canal landscape as a complex, multi-functional urban green-space which supports leisure and the consideration of heritage. These images were favoured for their complexity and for portraying a balanced vision of the city: 'Nice combination of items – trees/boat/canal/ the town. The others don't

have this sort of balance' (Female, 30 (4)), and 'people sitting having lunch/dinner or drinks; I am kind of person who likes coffee shops/restaurant out door' (Kuwaiti female, 27 (3)).

Despite the overwhelming preference for the images of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace, over 20% of respondents chose images 1, 2, 5 and 6. Approximately one in five respondents perceived the canal landscape differently to the majority view: evidence of a diversity of perceptions and suggestive of a potentially substantial number of individuals across the wider population. As discussed earlier, the most common themes relating to the least popular images (1, 2, 5 and 6) focused on the ideas of traditionalism, proximity to or escape from the city, the presence and effects of water, and boating respectively. These themes are not unusual perceptions of the canal landscape, but they do suggest an absence of perceptions relating to the juxtaposition of modernity and heritage, (retail and dining) leisure, and green-space - all of which were common positive perceptions of the most popular images.

The inclusion of narrative scenarios indicates the presence of associations and recollections, and a deep engagement with the visual stimulus of the postcard methodology as they highlight the power of an image to trigger a recollection of physical experiences of a place (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989):

Narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought ... It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining ... Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories (Diaz-Moore 2006, 35).

The two most popular images on the postcard each elicited five instances of memory-recall whereby respondents shared a memory instigated by seeing the postcard image. These two images include different landscape components, for instance '*Gas Street Basin*' (Image 3) shows older canal buildings, a tunnel, a cast-iron bridge, towpath, people dining and walking, a modern pink boat, a little greenery and a Victorian-style lantern. '*Brindleyplace*' (Image 4) shows a narrow boat, the canal, a modern bridge with people walking across it, some trees and the modern (1990s) International Convention Centre. Despite their visual differences, the images elicited the sharing of similar memories relating to walking the towpaths, enjoying canal-side dining during the summer and the visual appearance of the canals pre-development. For example, two respondents shared similar recollections of these areas: 'So nice in the summer; eating lunch outside [...] a pleasant way to walk through the city' (White female, 26 (3)), and 'Hidden just behind is All Bar One

where I spent quite a few hours with great friends. A beautiful walk along the canal was always enjoyable / memorable' (White female, 30 (4)).

'*Gas Street Basin*' (3) was slightly more conducive to recollections of the area prior to its redevelopment ('it truly was Dickensian back in the 60s/70s' (Male (3)); however, pre-development memories of both areas were often juxtaposed with how the areas have improved. For example, these respondents remembered the areas' pasts, but prefer the post-development sites for their leisure potential: 'Born in Hockley, Birmingham and knew Gas Street before it was modernised. It is much better now with a cosmopolitan atmosphere' (Female, 70 (3)) and 'I remember these canals when they were rubbish tips. I pick number four because last year my family enjoyed a 60th birthday party on the barges it was a wonderful day out. After these years it's wonderful to see all the changes that's happening' (White British female, 83 (4)). A second study requesting open responses would enable comparisons between the types of images and narratives participants return when they are given complete freedom, and may result in more instances of memory-sharing than were observed in this study.

The places represented in images 3 and 4 may both be regarded as memory/musing 'hotspots' in the canal landscape as they both elicited relatively high numbers of memory

recall and musings in respondents. As each image shows a recognisable visitor attraction (*Gas Street Basin* and *Brindleyplace*), the popularity of the images and the types of recollections they instigated were anticipated. Recollections chiefly related to leisure and 'memorable' instances of landscape engagement such as dining with friends and family on holidays and special occasions. As these two 'hotspots' are within a few minutes' walking distance of each other, it is conceivable that visitors would walk around both these places as part of a visit to the canal. The reasons for the concentration of emplaced memories and involuntary memories at these 'memory hotspots' is unclear, but one hypothesis is the idea that as a high-traffic destination area which has undergone regeneration, *Gas Street Basin* possesses the potential for attracting more visitors to emplace memories there.

Many respondents included narrative musings on the 'not-present'; historical musings of the canal landscape ('it conjures up the atmosphere of the canals when they were first used more than a 100 years ago' (Female (3)); and speculative musings ('you can enjoy the tranquillity of the canal within close proximity of the buzz of the city' (English White female, 59 (4)). The majority of responses take the form of reasoned statements, as with 'It has snow on it and is pretty' (White British male, 25 (1)), but some of the speculative

musings relate specifically to either real or imagined visitors, suggesting that these respondents specifically considered individual characters and the images they might like to receive. For example, ‘... these are the two that I would choose to send to my penfriend in the USA’ (Female, (3) and (4)) .

### Conclusions

Returning the ‘research postcard’ is a familiar performative act, redolent of choosing a holiday postcard based on its cover image(s) and sending it to a friend with a holiday story on the reverse. I hoped that the postcard would mimic the performative ritual of writing and sending a postcard, and would elicit the sharing of information in the form of experiences and observations. I anticipated that the commemorative aspect of postcards, as a complex form of souvenir that is not kept by the individual recording the memories, but is rather sent to an absent other imbued with association-laden narrative, would lead more respondents to share memories of the canal landscape than did. Certainly in the other studies which were based on walking in the canal landscape, the evocation of memories was a significant finding; generally participants in these studies recalled memories based on sensory ‘triggers’. In the ‘Postcards from the Cut’ study, the only sensory engagement is with the visual, which may explain the reduced number of memory-based

narratives returned by individuals; however, that respondents returned some of these types of narrative still highlights the power of images to elicit memories. The invitation to choose was an important aspect of the methodology, as we spend time on holiday choosing a postcard that represents our own perception of the holiday landscape, and crucially how we would want it to be perceived by the receiver. So the postcard mirrored this activity, in that respondents chose an image they felt representative of the city’s canal landscape and which they would like their imaginary receiver to see. The postcard method does not require presence in the landscape, but relies on respondents’ prior experiences of the landscape and their imaginations. Many responses referred to walking in the landscape, either through memories or musings, and the majority related to the Brindleyplace and Gas Street Basin areas, which are popular visitor attractions. In the same way that indoor conversations with participants can indicate the phenomenon of ‘locomotion-by-proxy’<sup>6</sup>, the prevalence of walking in the responses suggests that respondents recalled prior experiences of walking in the canal landscape, instigated by seeing images of places they had visited, hence the popularity of the images of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace.

The findings demonstrate that individuals each experience and

therefore perceive the landscape differently, and that although many respondents share similar general perceptions of the canal landscape or image preferences (relating to heritage or leisure for instance), their personal experiences of this and other landscapes result in different rationales, associations and memories linked to the sensory stimuli of the canal landscape. Evidence suggests that certain places in the Brindleyplace area are commonly linked with the expression of the evocation of memories, which supports the idea of the landscape as a 'repository of memory', and which was also observed in earlier walking narratives from the wider research (Tuan 1974, 97). The images of Gas Street Basin (3) and the central bridge at Brindleyplace (4) elicited far more memory-based responses than any other image on the postcard; this is attributable to those places' statuses as local tourist attractions with nearby leisure facilities, thus visitors are more likely to have visited there to be able to emplace memories. Commonalities do exist between participants' perceptions of the landscape e.g. heritage value, but the differences between responses become apparent when they are considered at an individual level. It is evident that although participants sometimes arrive at similar, general perceptions, their language, rationales and associations with the landscape are more complex and individual.

The narratives returned by respondents resemble those produced by participants in the walking studies which form the wider research; they included references to similar iconic landscape components (water, greenery, boats) and similar concepts (relaxation, heritage, modernity, and their juxtaposition); the sharing of memories (of previous visits or times); evidence of musing (wondering about the canal's past in particular); and some evidence of multi-modal sensory engagement, as with the respondent who wrote 'reminds me of the smell of beautiful summer days' (Female, 40 (4)). The findings suggest the postcard method is an effective technique for remotely eliciting individuals' landscape perceptions on a larger scale than would be possible using in-situ walking methodologies. This makes it potentially very useful in a number of scenarios where participation rates are lowered by physical constraints.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> My British Waterways organisational supervisor offered guidance on case study sites which had been recently regenerated; these were the sites they were interested in learning more about in terms of user perceptions. He also suggested I focus on a non-boating participant base, as a great deal of their existing data is taken from interviews with the leisure/residential boating communities.
- <sup>2</sup> Ethno-phenomenology combines ethnography and phenomenology. Ethnography is the description of the nature of peoples (ethnos) in writing (graphy) and primarily



involves the use of interviews and participant observation, or action research (Pink 2009, 10). The main difference between ethnography and this research methodology is the focus on the individual. This research does not seek to group people together to glean a shared response; rather it seeks to explore the multiplicity of responses. If shared responses occur they are an interesting phenomenon, but are not the aim. 'Classic' ethnography involves spending large portions of time observing and perhaps living with the peoples being studied; however this is impractical in this research context. Nonetheless, ethnography's focus on a range of narrative techniques ranging from small-talk to formal interviews provides scope for interaction and lends authenticity to the conversational aspects of qualitative studies. Phenomenology is the study of experience and appearances from a first-person narrative perspective, and 'calls for a heightened receptivity of all the senses' (Leach 1997, 83). The 'true' form of phenomenology is based on the work of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and is concerned with more than bodily, sensory experiences in that it 'studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic activity' (S.E.P. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

<sup>3</sup> Grounded Theory (GT) is a system whereby the researcher starts not with a hypothesis as with standard research methodologies, but with data collection. The data are then codified into categories upon which a theory can be formed. GT is the inverse of the traditional research method in which methodologies are aligned with a theoretical framework, a hypothesis is posited and data are collected accordingly to test that hypothesis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The joint originators of this method, Barney Glaser

and Anselm Strauss, later separated their approaches, creating the Glaserian and Straussian paradigms (Devadas et al. 2011). The Glaserian paradigm is based on the notion that 'all is data', while the Straussian paradigm takes a more scientific approach, by starting with a research problem followed by research questions (Devadas et al. 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Iain Biggs and Sarah Blowen, 'Borderland Postcards – Responding to Postcards from the Physical and Cultural Borders of Europe'. AHRC Living Landscapes conference, Aberystwyth, 18–21 June 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Red Kite Environment Ltd undertook a consultation of local children prior to the regeneration of Stourport-on-Severn Basins. Children were asked to draw a picture of Stourport on a blank postcard. Red Kite Environment also undertook consultation work at Fradley Junction where they prompted participants to produce hand-drawn postcards in order to discover locals' landscape preferences.

<sup>6</sup> 'Locomotion-by-proxy' was observed in indoor, seated conversations with participants. Participants drew maps and diagrams of landscapes they had visited. As they talked, they traced 'walking routes' around the images with their fingers and narrated their 'passage', recalling the landscape components they had experienced and in some cases triggering memories. In this way the physical act of moving their fingers around a representation of a place created an equivalent experience or 'locomotion-by-proxy'.

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# **‘It’s Coming from the Heart’: Exploring a Student’s Experiences of ‘Home’ Using Participatory Visual Methodologies**

Lindsey Jayne McCarthy

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*This introductory study explores the meanings and images of ‘home’ for a student living in student accommodation within the United Kingdom. It makes a case for the use of visual methodologies, as well as outlining their contribution to theorising the geographies of space, gender, and the home. In addition to furthering debates about the meanings of ‘home’, it establishes the visual as a valid form of sociological knowledge, ethnography, and representation, and adds to critiques of visual methodologies more broadly. Employing a combination of auto-photography and photo-elicitation methods, this study forms a collaborative effort between research participant and researcher, to create and interpret the visual images of ‘home’. The setting of the ‘home’ – regarded as one of the most familiar places for its occupants – is defamiliarised and made strange and interesting again through the medium of photography. This study positions itself within this research gap and dilemma by building on existing work which has sought to ‘make the familiar strange’ through creative methodologies.*

*Keywords: Home, Participatory, Visual Methodologies, Auto-photography, Photo-elicitation*

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## **Introduction**

This paper explores the use of auto-photography<sup>1</sup> and photo-elicitation<sup>2</sup> as participatory visual methodologies for understanding the geographies of home for a student living in student accommodation. In this study, I invited the participant to utilise a disposable camera to take photographs as part of the

research process, and discussed these photographs in a follow-up photo-elicitation interview. Students are an interesting group due to the nature of their housing experiences: it is often the first time they have lived away from the family home; they are in flux between student and parental homes, between dependence and independence (Lincoln

2012). As Siân Lincoln (2012, 133) posits, 'going to university opens up new "private" spaces of identity for young people, outside many constraints of the parental home'. It is worthwhile exploring how this facet of identity might influence understandings of 'home'. How 'home' is felt ties into debates in human geography concerning the domestic as a locus of identity, so that people who are differently positioned according to gender, class, age, sexuality and ethnicity may have differential experiences of 'home' (Brickell 2012). Being aware of existing feminist critiques of 'home', the significant connections between gender and 'home', and the idea that 'home' can be a place within which gender relations may be reinforced, re-negotiated or deeply embedded, directed me towards a study which focuses on gender and student status. Although identity is a complex phenomenon and cannot be bundled into neat categories, I am aware that privileging any one of the other identity dimensions would also prove fruitful for future studies. In terms of identity, 'people accommodate to and adapt to ... identities to varying degrees, but are not totally bound by them' (Green 2004, 57). While the participant's identity as a student and a woman may have some bearing, they must not be considered the only influences (Bijoux and Myers 2006). I see gender as a performative category (Butler 1990), a structure which need not be seen

as deterministic. With the exception of Liz Kenyon (1999) and Lincoln (2012), little work to date has focused on meanings of home for students; most emphasis is placed upon young people's experiences within the family home (Lincoln 2012: 64). Kenyon (1999) explores the experiences of students who leave their parental homes to live in university accommodation, and concludes that neither this temporary home nor their parents' residence is viewed as an acceptable long-term home. Students invested more promise in their imagined future home; in this case, 'home' was more of an aspiration than a current fixed space. This study seeks to expand upon Kenyon's claim to ask how the student home can be experienced beyond the bricks and mortar of the house.

This paper also establishes the visual as a valid form of sociological knowledge and adds to critiques of visual methodologies. I attempt to involve the participant at several stages of the research: inviting the participant to create images and trusting her to make her own interpretations. Visual methodologies offer promising alternatives to traditional social scientific research approaches, which have tended to over-rely on language as the means of accessing interpretations. These traditional approaches have come under fire from feminist scholars (Reinharz 1992; Letherby 2003) on the grounds that they use

participants as mere 'suppliers' of data. One of the starting points for employing visual methodologies is their emphasis on participation. I was aware of the potential of auto-photography to promote engagement (Robinson 2011), necessary for a subject area which has often neglected women's (and students') voices in accounts of home.

Over the last few decades, scholars across a range of disciplines have contributed to debates about what constitutes 'home' (Parsell 2012). The deconstruction of home can be seen as taking place against a backdrop of geographical enquiry into the concept of 'place', no longer conceptualised as being 'coherent, bounded and settled' (Massey 1992: 54). The 'place' of the home can be expanded to mean much more than the bricks and mortar of the 'house', to a 'socio-spatial entity', a 'psycho-spatial entity' and an 'emotional warehouse' (Easthope 2004: 134). Iris Young (1997) argues for the imaginative and affective geographies of home, referring to feelings and objects that evoke memories of people and places. The home is opened beyond its tangible sense to that which can be experienced emotionally and psychologically. If 'home' does not simply refer to the bricks and mortar of the house, but reflects social and emotional attributes (Moyle 1997), it follows that methodological tools must adapt to accommodate these multi-sensory geographies.

Scholars who seek to understand the everyday geographies of place are often confronted by the challenge of 'making the familiar strange and interesting again' (Erickson 1986, 121). Since the 'home' is regarded as one of the most familiar places for its occupants (Bachelard 1994), this seems methodologically challenging. This study situates itself within this research gap and dilemma – that of 'fighting familiarity' (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) – by building on existing work which has sought to 'make the familiar strange' (Erickson 1986, 121) through creative methodologies. In this case, the domestic setting is placed within the frame of enquiry, following Sarah Pink's (2004) call for methods which engage with the 'pluri-sensory' character of the home. Researchers are increasingly utilising innovative visual research methodologies, such as auto-photography, video diaries, drawing, and participatory mapping<sup>3</sup> as tools of defamiliarisation. One study by Rosy Martin (1999) confronted the familiarity of her childhood home by taking macro, 'close-up' photographs, rendering common-place objects strange and acting as a second glance by forcing the viewer to look at everyday objects through new lights, unusual perspectives and different lenses. Dawn Mannay (2010, 107) addresses the difficulties of conducting fieldwork in a familiar cultural setting by adopting visual methods, which she argues, act to 'counter the tacit and

normalising effect of knowledge'. For Julie Kaomea (2003), the use of children's artwork, as a method of data production, rendered 'strange' the familiar spaces of the classroom and the educational system. Visual methodologies, therefore, offer the opportunity to de-familiarise the setting of the home, not only in terms of objects, but processes and events that may otherwise be considered trivial. I employ the participant-directed visual method of auto-photography as an instrument for making the familiar 'home' strange and interesting again.

This research informed part of a pilot study for my PhD project, which aimed to explore the potential of auto-photography and photo-elicitation in capturing the complexities of the representation of meanings of home and identities. My research participant, Katy, is a 21-year-old undergraduate student at a UK university, who was recruited to take part in this study in 2012, when she was in her second year of study. Katy describes herself as a white, middle-class, heterosexual female. She grew up in Yorkshire, living with her parents, younger brother, and pets. She has lived in the same house since birth, only moving away to study at university. Her father runs his own accountancy firm, and her mother works part-time as a teaching assistant at a local primary school. I asked Katy to participate in this study for a number of reasons: I was aware of her interest in arts,

crafts, and photography, and thought this project might be appealing to her. Second, given the limited time and resources available to complete this pilot project, it was practical to select a participant with whom access would not prove to be problematic; and knowing Katy's pathway from her family home in Yorkshire to student accommodation located almost 100 miles away, I thought this physical distance between both 'homes' might prove interesting to explore. The sample was comprised of a single case study of one participant. I believed it was possible to gain a greater depth of understanding through the richness of visual data as produced through auto-photographic and photo-elicitation methods. As Sarah Johnsen et al. (2008, 205) posit, auto-photography is 'a powerful heuristic tool that can enhance understanding in new and nuanced ways'.

I share a number of characteristics with the research participant; we are both white, heterosexual women in our twenties who possess similar educational backgrounds, and grew up within a few miles of each other. Although I consider myself to come from a relatively working-class background, having since entered academia as a PhD student, I straddle the boundaries of working-class and middle-class. However, not so long ago, I experienced life as an undergraduate student living away from my parental home for the first time. I also knew

Katy for a number of years before I conducted this study. This level of familiarity with the research participant and her experiences positions me as an 'intimate insider' (Taylor 2011, 6), a term used to describe researchers 'whose pre-existing friendships (close, distant, casual or otherwise) evolve into informant relationships – friend-informants'. Although insider/outsider debates have been critiqued as 'inadequate in an absolute sense' (Mannay 2010, 92), exploring the complexities of the research relationship and questions of proximity is still methodologically useful. Shared knowledge and experiences can help towards decentring the imbalances of power between researcher and participant, commonly a feature of research encounters (Rogan and Kock 2005). Furthermore, as Jodie Taylor (2011) notes, data gathered from friend-informants can be significantly richer in volume and depth. Common ground can facilitate 'a relaxed, open atmosphere' in the interview context (Mannay 2010, 94). For all its advantages in terms of power and rapport, the status of 'insider' carries with it potential dangers which must equally be considered. My assumption of understanding the participant's experiences may inflict what Mannay (2010, 94) describes as a 'deadenning effect' on the interview process, or what Taylor (2011, 9) terms 'insider blindness'. The issue then becomes one of attempting to see

through the fog of familiarity to the insightful aspects of everyday life that I might take for granted. Among the range of techniques adopted by several researchers, 'to make the familiar strange and interesting again' (Erikson 1986, 121), participant-directed visual methods prove desirable (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) and 'provide a gateway to destinations that lay beyond my repertoire of preconceived understandings' (Mannay 2010, 96). I therefore decided to employ auto-photography, a method which promotes participant autonomy, attempts to 'de-familiarise' (Shklovsky 1917/1965) taken-for-granted perspectives, and goes beyond the constraints of preconceived understandings in the standard research interview.

The following research question is explored, after having been identified as a relevant research gap, emerging from the reviewed literature: how might the student home be experienced and expressed beyond its 'bricks and mortar'? The paper begins by situating the study in a wider research and historical context, and focusing on debates around the geographies of space, gender and home. It then moves to consider the methodological implications of auto-photography and photo-elicitation. I attempt to suggest subjective meanings of the participant's images, based on a captioning-exercise<sup>4</sup> and reflections on the photographs in the photo-elicitation interview<sup>5</sup>. While I pose



some outstanding questions regarding the interpretation and power dynamics of participatory visual methodologies, these are acknowledged in order to further develop and make full use of the potential of such approaches. I endeavour to propose the usefulness of auto-photography as another lens through which geographies of the everyday, such as the home, can be better interrogated.

### **Geographies of Space, Gender and Home**

The paper will now focus on current geographical debates around space, gender and home to illustrate broad themes in the literature. The concept of home has been an increasingly popular focus of geographical inquiry since the mid-1990s, particularly among critical geographers. The burgeoning interest across a range of disciplines, which focuses on people's experiences and understandings of home (May 2000) is no doubt a reflection of an increasing awareness of the concept's significance which has taken place alongside the emergence of the 'cultural turn' within the discipline of geography. To echo Peter Somerville (1989, 115), the home is significant because it is the locale through which 'key kinship ties are reinforced'; it is also constructed as important by various social actors, politicians, the mass media, and the everyday public; idioms about home ('Home is Where the Heart Is'; 'There's No Place Like

Home') are ingrained in language and culture, so that home becomes 'both an imposed ideal and a potent cultural and individual ideal' (Kellett and Moore 2003, 128). This developing academic debate has led to a proliferation of ideas, understandings and definitions, which – while muddying the waters – has opened up the term 'home' to alternative conceptualisations. The major point to understand is that home cannot be regarded as a neutral space; its doors have been opened to highly differentiated meanings, meanings which are rich with emotion, memory and affect.

Nicholas Moyle (1997) recognizes the affective geographies of home; the home does not necessarily just refer to bricks and mortar, but also reflects social and emotional attributes. For instance, the imagined and culturally imposed notion of the 'ideal home' has an important influence on present living situations. Despite its imaginary state, the spectre of the ideal home is very real. The ideal home is held in tension with lived experiences and has a significant effect on sense of self and home (Bennett 2004). The recent British representation of the 'ideal home' is summed up by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006) as a detached, owner-occupied suburban house containing heterosexual, middle-class, white nuclear families. In a society which privileges homeownership (Gurney 1997), the state and the media vilify those who do

not fit into normalised categories. Such strategies clearly seep into lives and home-making practices, affecting how home is experienced.

While an ideal home is conceptualised as a paradise (Somerville 1989), a private space where one can 'be oneself' away from the gaze of others (Saunders 1990), this has been contested from a feminist angle. Linda McDowell (1983) posits that the ideals of family and privacy can work in conflict, emphasising a form of 'togetherness, intimacy, and interest in each other's business' (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 89) which may deny this privacy. A consequence of prioritising an ideal of privacy is its implications for domestic violence; the home can be seen as a private realm in which the state should not intervene (Malos and Hague 1997). Feminist critiques (Wardhaugh 1999; Bell 1991; Peled and Muzicant 2008) have unpacked these normative ideals by arguing that they embody patriarchal values of heterosexuality and the white, middle-class, nuclear family. What for some might be an ideal home, may be a prison (Wardhaugh 1999), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar 1995), and a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine 1995) for potentially excluded others. Much of the literature focuses on women as such excluded others (Wardhaugh 1999; Tomas and Dittmar 1995) asserting that the experiences of home are different for men and women

(Gurney 1997; Somerville 1989). This has included studies on how home can take on different meanings for homosexuals, transsexuals, or bisexuals who share a house with heterosexual family members and find it constraining to be under the 'parental gaze' (Bell 1991); studies on how homeless women have come to represent the 'unaccommodated woman' (Wardhaugh 1999) because the street is seen as a risky, male space in contrast to the security, order, and 'femaleness' of the home; and studies which have examined the meaning of home for homeless women revealing that many became homeless due to violence within their 'home' (Peled and Muzicant 2008). Einat Peled and Amit Muzicant (2008) argue that home as a place of domesticity and family life reinforces expectations of women to raise a family and maintain a perfect home, distinct from the outside, masculine world.

The gendering of home stems back to the mid-twentieth century when women in the west were primarily associated with the domestic realm (Morley, 2000). David Morley (2000) contends that it is still the case that at a simple, material level, women in the UK are even now much more subsumed in the home than are men. Modern culture frequently portrayed men in the role of the *flâneur*<sup>6</sup>, or the stranger with the freedom to wander the public sphere of the city. It is this historical connection with home that ar-

guably gives home a unique and more complex set of meanings for women. Peter Saunders (in Gurney 1997, 374) suggests that 'the orthodox feminist image of the home as an oppressive institution simply does not square with what women themselves say about it ...' This view has since been deemed unreliable on methodological grounds by Craig Gurney (1997). A major critique of Saunders' work was that it adhered to malestream positivism (Gurney 1997, 382), resulting in women's voices being absent from the study. As Gurney states, assertions that there is a lack of evidence to supporting a view of the home as an oppressive place for women reveals more about the limitations of malestream positivism than feminist scholarship per se. Consequently, studies emerging from the fields of urban sociology and housing studies (Gurney 1997) have rejected Saunders' conclusions on methodological and theoretical grounds and have sought to place women's voices back into accounts of home. Gurney (1997) explored the meanings of home for men and women in St. George, in Bristol. He found that gender was indeed an important factor in accounting for the ways in which men and women felt about and explained home, with women expressing much more complex accounts of meaning when compared with male respondents. For instance, housework was simultaneously referred to as a source of

pride as well as a source of much resentment and boredom (Gurney 1997, 375).

Normative conceptions of 'home' have developed as ultimately associated with happy (nuclear, heterosexual) family values taking place within a physical structure (ideally, an owner-occupied, detached house in the suburbs). This has had implications for those who feel excluded if they do not fit with such conventions. The darker side of home (the *unheimlich*<sup>7</sup>) is largely missing from these traditional accounts of home and remains to be elaborated. It can be asserted that the home is much more complicated than such constructions imply, and rather functions as a complex, fluid, socially-constructed, and often contradictory term. As a brief review of the diverse body of literature on 'home' has demonstrated, it is the porosity of the concept which must be adhered to, expanding the home outwards, beyond its meaning as a bounded unit, towards the wider neighbourhood, the mobile world and the realm of imaginative geographies to redefine how such meanings may alter over time and for different people. In order to conduct research that takes the embodied, sensory and emotional aspects of home seriously, a 'methodological re-framing is in order' (Latham 2003, 2000). It is with this desire to capture the nuanced and personal meanings of home that I chose to employ the method of auto-photography.

### **Opening up the Home to Visual Methodologies**

In 1967, John Collier established photography as a legitimate research method in anthropology. Douglas Harper (1998) and Howard Becker (1974) recognised the contributions that photography could make to sociological research, illustrating their articles with photographs. While David Gauntlett (2007, 106) recognises the indebtedness we have towards these earlier visual ethnographic studies, he also notes their reluctance to 'hand over the camera'. Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on participatory production. Respondent-generated visual data avoids some methodological issues which occur within researcher-created images, which may be seen as intrusive, a step towards photographing the 'other', or a retreat to ethnography's dark past.

This is not to say that participatory research is somehow power-neutral (Waite and Conn 2011). The researcher still holds ultimate control of initiating research questions, writing-up and theorising data. David Buckingham (2009) argues that participatory methods and researchers need to exercise reflexivity. One tenet of feminist ethnography is the recognition of positionality; we are situated in economic, social, and cultural relations. Theories bear the marks of their makers (Skeggs 1997). Reflexivity connotes a '... kind of self-awareness and self-scrutiny, [it] asks that

researchers consider their own position in the research process, as well as investigating the position of their respondents' (Holliday 2004, 55). This highlights that we can only ever produce partial knowledge (Skeggs 1994). Helen Longino (2010) asks if this means abandoning the central goal and concept of epistemology, which she defines as 'truth'. Rather than seeing this as a hindrance, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding (in Skeggs 1994) argue that acknowledging partial perspective heightens vision and the opposite, 'unlocatable knowledge' (Haraway in Skeggs 1994: 79), is that which is 'irresponsible'. Haraway (in Skeggs 2001) maintains it is better to take responsibility for the reproduction of power than trying to claim equality of power with the respondent. As Les Back (2004, 134) posits, photographs are not 'views from nowhere'. The recognition of researcher and respondent positionality means that taking a reflexive stance is a far cry from the supposed value-neutrality of traditional academic enquiry and has a lot to commend it.

### **Auto-photography**

Auto-photography refers to photography carried out by the research participant as opposed to the researcher as part of a research project (Lombard 2012). The method has roots in psychological explorations of self-identity (Ziller and Rorer 1985) but has more re-

cently been taken up by sociology, social science, geography, and anthropology. Studies from geography have included Johnsen et al.'s (2008) research with the street homeless which concluded that auto-photography helped in highlighting hidden spaces, otherwise inaccessible to the researcher; and David Dodman's (2003) auto-photographic exploration of the urban environment in Kingston, Jamaica. Sociology has also witnessed increasing use of visual methods. Steven Gold's (2004) work demonstrated the importance of photography in developing the understanding of migrant communities. Scholars across these disciplines cite several advantages of auto-photography, including its participatory nature and its potential to construct knowledge with the participant as 'expert' (Meth and McClymont 2009), and its geographic potential to emphasise the multiple meanings that places can hold (Lombard 2012). I was drawn to visual methods because of their 'novelty factor' (Richards 2011, 2), their ability to keep people engaged in the research process for longer. In opting for auto-photography, I was aware of its accessibility compared to other visual methods (such as drawing or mapping) which require some prior requisite of artistic skill. As Melanie Lombard (2012) posits, the element of fun is central to auto-photography.

I conducted a prior meeting to ensure that the participant felt con-

fidant about the task, as well as the manual operation of the camera. A disposable camera was handed to the participant, which she kept for however long was deemed preferable, or until she felt she had taken enough photographs (a fortnight). The participant was asked to take photographs of anything that made up her 'home environment', which I stipulated could be positive or negative, inside or outside, or anything about 'home' she wished to comment on. The aim was to provide encouragement without seeming overbearing. The camera was returned by post and photographs were developed with two copies made. The photographs were numbered to make transcription and analysis more straightforward. A challenge that was borne in mind was how the social conventions of photography might constrain the participant's choice of photographic subjects. To attempt to resolve this issue, explicit permission was granted to the participant to photograph 'the good, the bad, and the ugly' (Guillemin and Drew 2010, 180).

Auto-photography allows participants to show their life worlds as well as to interpret them. It has the potential to promote engagement (Robinson 2011), necessary for a subject area which has so often neglected women's voices. Use of auto-photography complements feminist theory by attempting to confront power relations through sharing information. As David Gauntlett

and Peter Holzwarth (2006) posit, the approach is trusting of people's ability to generate interesting observations themselves. Engaging the individual in the research, and allowing them to actually produce an artefact, communicates their feelings, meanings and understandings. Auto-photography is committed to the co-production of knowledge between researchers and researched, allowing active engagement of people as 'meaning-producing beings' (Holloway and Valentine in Waite and Conn 2011, 116).

### **Photo-Elicitation**

Photo-elicitation is 'the use of photographs in conjunction with qualitative interviewing [and] is a long-established method in visual sociology' (Newbury 2005, 2). In many studies, auto-photography is used as part of a mixed methods approach (Lombard 2012), commonly combined with a face-to-face interview after the photographs have been taken and developed. Usually the follow-up interview discusses why the particular photographs were taken, and the meanings within each photograph for the participant. Harper (2002, 14) attributes its origins to Collier's (1957) work which examined mental health in changing communities in Canada: 'The technique was put to use in research when the Cornell team used photo elicitation to examine how families adapted to residence among ethnically different people,

and to new forms of work in urban factories'. The researchers found that the photographs triggered participants' memories and reduced areas of misunderstanding. Since Collier, sociologists and anthropologists have employed photo-elicitation in a range of ways. France Winddance Twine (2006) used photo-elicitation interviews, using family photographs, in a longitudinal ethnographic study on race and intimacy. Harper (1984) and Gold (1986) used photographs taken by the researcher in their work on dairy farmers in a rural New York state (Harper 1984) and research with two sub-populations of Vietnamese refugees (Gold 1986) respectively.

The photo-elicitation interview in this study involved a discussion of the participant's images for the participant to further articulate and reflect on their meanings. The topic guide ensured that the very basics were ascertained, including what the photograph depicted; why the participant had chosen to take the photograph; what the participant felt about the subject depicted; which photograph most summed up 'home' for the participant; what the participant felt they could not convey through images; and how the participant found the exercise. The participant was asked to add captions to each photograph to allow for additional reflection; she was also asked if there were any photographs which she wished to exclude from the research. The representa-

tion of photographs by the participant in the interview and captioning exercise informed analysis. A significant motivation in opting for photo-elicitation was how it can enable participants to interpret visual material themselves instead of simply taking the researcher's interpretation as gospel. It has been argued that such practices prove motivating for participants if they help to prompt memories or emotional responses (Buckingham 2009). Underpinning photo-elicitation is a notion of *sharing* – arriving at understandings together. This goes some way to redressing imbalances of power between researcher and participant, often cited as a major methodological obstacle in feminist research. These visual methods hope to allow for a process of 'reflection' by allowing the participant time to think about what she wishes to express; to be able to do this creatively; and to express what may be difficult to express in words alone (Guillemin and Drew 2010). Images offer avenues that go beyond the spoken word, allowing the participant to say things that may be difficult to express verbally (Hogan and Pink 2010): to *show* their world as well as speak it.

While the participant could assign copyright to the images, an issue arose regarding people who may appear in them. I briefed the participant about seeking permission prior to taking images of others. It was considered good practice to ask for

written consent from the individual portrayed via the research participant, and a separate consent form was signed. An information sheet and consent form, which clearly outlined the purpose, potential risks and hoped-for benefits of the research and withdrawal procedures, was distributed to the participant. The subsequent sections of this paper will explore the themes that were drawn from the project, summarised under the categories of: *familiarity, comfort and routine; 'make it yours'; relationships; nostalgia or 'I used to make them with my mum'; and the 'un-home-like'.*

### Familiarity, Comfort and Routine



A prominent theme seems to resonate with the normative 'house as haven' thesis, echoing several scholars' assertions that 'home' has been discursively positioned as a romanticised site of existence, 'a metaphor for experiences of joy and protection' (Brickell 2012: 225). The themes of comfort through things



which were familiar ('particularly the basil plant ... we've got one at home and I bought my own to sort of create a home away from home ... just trying to create a similar atmosphere') and routine came through as prominent in the interview and



photographs. The participant spoke of, '... that physical sense of comfort I always associate with home because ... moving away is quite disorientating'. This corresponds to the normative Western, largely middle-class meaning of home which stems back to its association with a physical structure, providing rootedness, comfort, security, and stability: 'A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction' (Oxford English Dictionary 2007).

This came through in the photographs depicting a bed with a patchwork duvet and cushions, cookbooks, and a house plant. The bed was identified as the most poignant image of home. After moving in, making her bed was the first thing Katy did to make it feel like she was 'at home again':

... because the bed is kind of like the first thing that I did to make this feel like I was at home again when I moved in to make me feel a little bit more comfortable. I made the bed up and set it as I wanted it. And obviously it's something that you're in contact with every day when you go to sleep and it's a familiar routine in that that's where you will go to sleep tonight. So you've got that routine which I think is nice.

Home, or the idea of home, becomes imbued in objects. This re-



sounds with literature around 'affective geographies of home' (Young 1997): 'home' is not simply a place where people reside but an emotional and imaginative space. The bed became 'home' itself; a comfortable sanctuary, or a 'physical space where you can just sort of lie down, relax, and be incredibly comfortable', which 'you're in contact with every day' and 'where you will go to sleep tonight'. It is physically comfortable, but comfortable in the sense of being familiar too. The association of *comfort* with 'home' was repeated in the participant's reflections on the basil plant and cookbooks: 'I do really ... enjoy cooking...doing familiar recipes and that idea of *comfort* food', and 'It [local produce] just ... brings everything a bit nearer, feels a little bit more natural'. The idea of home was referred to as something permanent: '... that idea of permanence is something for me that is quite homely'. Permanence, the familiar, routine, and comfortable are placed in contrast to the short-termism and temporary nature of the student dwelling, and the disorientation of moving – a frequent event for students. Elements of 'home' were transferred to meaningful possessions and objects that made Katy feel comfortable through their familiarity or warmth. Student houses, described as being 'plain', are insufficient in themselves to provide homeliness; this is achieved through personal objects: '... the physical space I don't think is mine

but when you look at it with everything in, it feels like it'.

The symbols of home recounted here perhaps restate the most popular and oft-cited of discourses. Associations of the home with belonging and rootedness are relics of the 'house as haven' thesis; but these ideals are recreated through objects by the student in her replication of homeliness in the student home. In this sense, 'home' is something which is inside the bricks and mortar of the house, constituting the house rather than being the house itself.

#### 'Make it yours'



The 'house as haven' thesis has faced considerable critique from a feminist perspective (Carter 1995; Johnston and Valentine 1993; Bennett 2004). Instead of a simplistic haven for the self, the domestic has been conceptualised as a potential site of struggle and a 'continuous process of negotiations, contracts, [and] renegotiations'



(Brickell 2012, 226). These images elicited responses around having to *make* the house a home. Home is often talked about as something which is ‘created’ by the participant. The vase of daffodils (‘it’s not something you need, it’s not integral to your living’) acted as a luxury item which created a ‘pretty atmosphere’ against the stark walls of university accommodation; the personalised name signs provided a way of ‘putting your stamp on’ the doors; the colourful, imperfect rug was a way of ‘injecting colour’ and ‘trying to re-

flect something of [the] self’. Of importance here is the idea of ‘home’ as *negotiation*, something that has to be worked on: more of a process or achievement than a static state or space.

Interrelated with this notion of making the house a home was the theme of control, in terms of a sense of ownership and possession: control over making the home feel like a place of your own, negotiating the limitations placed on students and private renters to exercise this control completely in a property which they do not technically ‘own’. This stamp of ownership and identity was particularly important because of the many people who have lived in the house previously:

It’s how they’ve sort of personalised the door that’s been somebody else’s door before theirs and before theirs and before that and before that ... this is quite a long-established student area. You know, there’s like at least six people who have had this room as *their* room and that door as *their* door ... so when you put something on there, even if it is only hanging your coat up on the back of the door, it makes it feel like it’s yours ... because you’ve put your stamp on it.

‘Putting your stamp’ on your room was also seen as important because of the standardised, institution-like university ‘halls’ accommodation, which students are forbidden to alter dramatically. This assertion is picked up particularly well in

Lincoln's (2012) work on youth culture and private space, which sees the bedroom as a place of 'escapism' from the chaos of family life; a space over which young people have some sense of ownership; a canvas on which to display their identities. Despite this small grasp on autonomy, young people's spaces are still subject to varying levels of control, invasion, and interventions. In the family home, this control usually comes from parents or guardians. In Lincoln's (2012) study, one participant spoke of her father's control, which manifested itself in aspects of her social and cultural life, including the use of her bedroom; curfews, restrictions on her choice of wall paint, curtains, carpets, and other furnishings were all recounted as limiting her ownership over that space. Likewise, brothers and sisters are nearly always invading that 'private space' (Lincoln 2012:83). While students living in student accommodation for the first time have the chance to exercise more independence away from the control and curfews of the family home, there is only so much they can alter. But, at least Katy could express her agency, and demonstrate to herself that she has a capacity for change through creativity:

I didn't go out and pick the furniture that's in here. Like at home, obviously, even if you took my items out, it's my room because I picked certain things that are in

there – from the wall colour to the carpet and the different pieces of furniture. Because even when the bed frame is left blank in here, I didn't pick that, it's not there for me; it's been there for countless other people.

... that room ... was my room, even though there were I think a hundred and something identical rooms to that, like other people's rooms ... but mine was mine because of the things in it ... like the bunting that's on the wall here sort of went across the ceiling last year. And even taking that down last year made it less mine.

Making the home feel like a 'place of your own' comes back to the idea of 'trying to reflect something of the self'. Of note here is the connection between 'home' and identity, or as Tony Whincup (2004) phrases it, the home and material objects within the home reflect and 'give shape to the self'. Katherine Brickell (2012, 226) similarly recognises the 'home as a locus of personality'. It is the things within the room which make it yours, and once these are taken down that sense of ownership comes down with them. Home can be understood as a means to display aspects of our identities (Belk 1988); possessions become imbued with meaning. This theme arose quite often:

... you can kind of say something about you through your room. Because ... I don't know ... when

someone comes into your room and says, 'Oh, your room's very you'... you know that kind of idea where your room expresses a kind of identity.

... like there's posters strategically dotted around my room ... they kind of cover every corner ... they try and show a little bit of me.

The participant felt that the colourful rug reflected her personality to an extent:

I think it sums me up quite well ... all of the clashing of the colours and things. Because not all of it strictly goes together but it all sort of comes together and it's not perfect. And there's bits that sort of stick out a bit and I quite like that ...

If 'home' is expressive of aspects of one's identity, and identity is understood as a matter of learning, a repetition of acts (Butler 1990), then 'home' may be an on-going construction intertwined with the construction and performance of the 'self'.

#### **'It's all about relationships'**

Home has been theorised as a site which plays host to social relations, from the loving to the oppressive. Relationships can determine what makes a dwelling a 'home' or a 'prison': from dodging the watchful gaze of the neighbour and various forms of surveillance, to living in a

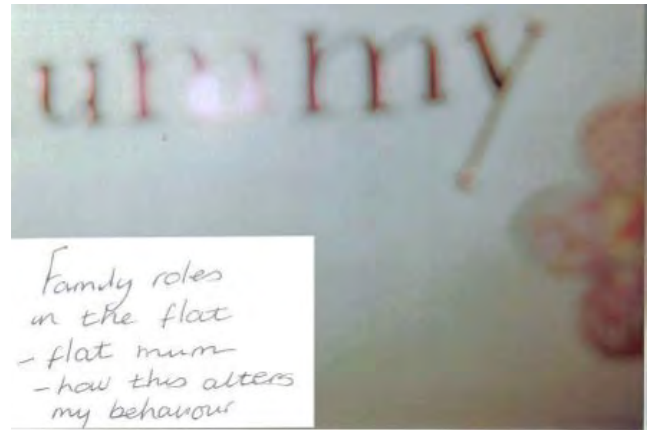
situation of domestic violence. In this sense, 'home' does not have to be restricted to physical structures but can be defined by social networks, connections, and people who take care of one another, a meaning of home which is often held by some people without housing (May 2000; Kidd and Evans 2011).

Here, relationships emerged as an integral element of 'home': '... for me, it's all about relationships and closeness'. Home was defined by people who take care of one another, and in this sense, goes beyond the physical structure:

I think when you're with someone that you're really comfortable with – and obviously people mean a lot – it makes you feel more sort of homely because you're with people that you kind of associate home with, sort of caring and intimacy and friendships and things.

Different types of relationships were acknowledged: keeping in touch with old friends via letters and mobile phones; displaying pictures of friends; and re-creating a familial structure amongst university 'house-mates':

I sort of ended up just sat on a bench, outside of my actual apartment, just reading [the letter] and felt really comfortable and really at home sat on the bench, just because I had a little bit of a friend from home in my hand.



And I've got – this sounds really sad – I've got saved voicemails on my phone of my mum's voice and my dad's voice. Just because ... which sounds really sad but sometimes it's nice just to call it and hear it. They don't know ... they're like nonsense messages ... like 'Can you call me back please?', but you know, it's there if you ever want it, if you want to hear them.

Many of these relationships were nostalgic or bittersweet ('you feel

like you're on the phone to that person and it brings you closer'), and were used prominently in the decoration of the home; others were in the present. The participant spoke of how she has taken on the parental role of 'Flat Mum', the mature figure people go to with their problems. This also brings with it a fair share of domestic tasks, spoken of both positively and negatively:

... in a way it's kind of bittersweet because you're being nurturing in that you're looking after people by

keeping the area clean for them to be in. But at the same time obviously you're creating an extra workload which should really be split. And I think that that really only does come about because I've got this title of 'Flat Mum'.

Being 'Flat Mum' also demands a certain way of performing (and not performing), suggesting that the home is not simply a space for a presentation of a 'real' self but a 'complex arrangement of spaces for the presentation of a miniaturised array of variable domestic selves' (Hepworth 1999, 19):

... it also makes you feel like you have to be a certain way then as well. I probably change my behaviour for Sarah, in that I'm very mature and she can come and talk to me and I'll sort of make sure her head's screwed on ... rather than being too giggly ... girly. I don't talk to her about my problems because I'm Flat Mum.

This complicates the version of 'domestic bliss' and echoes Gurney's (1997) study within which women simultaneously referred to housework and their domestic roles both as sources of pride and as sources of resentment. The participant attempts to transform the image of the 'ideal' home, of domestic harmony and haven, into reality. Even within the student home, the gendered norms of domesticity and

the expectations of women to maintain a perfect home take shape, though it is far more complex and contradictory than past studies have suggested. After all, not all women in Katy's household are taking up this role; rather it is one which Katy performs for them via her adopted status as 'Flat Mum'.

### **'I used to make them with my mum ...'**

These images show how the participant recollected her parental home in a nostalgic sense. The scones elicited memories from childhood, baking with her mother. The home-made cushion brought to mind '... sitting down in the living room with my mum'. The money jar was a chance to save up for day-trips ... 'like when I was at home'. 'Home' is almost always referred to as the parental home where the participant grew up: 'Like that cushion cover, that's something I made at home'; '... baking is something that I do quite a lot at home, and I used to make them with my mum when I was younger'; '... these are letters from home, from my best friends'. Home, in this sense, is something which is looked back on, a selectively recalled and presented past. Michael Jackson (in Mallett 2004) writes of 'home' from a phenomenological perspective, holding the ideas of the 'real' and 'ideal' homes in tension, as mutually defining. This is reinforced by Nigel Rapport and Andrea Dawson (1998, 8) who argue that



'home brings together memory and longing'. In this sense, home was referred to as the place where the participant grew up: 'When someone says "are you going home?" you say "yes", but they say "are you going home home?"' It is nothing new to suggest that the home is a sphere shaped by memories (Blunt 2005), but this may be intensified given the temporary and fleeting nature of the student dwelling. This recalled set of practices and expectations, associated with the parental home, are repeated to make the student home more *homely*. Rather than understanding the meaning of home as inherent and fixed, this

approach takes its meaning to be performative – whether home is a performance for others or a performance of home-making rituals inherited from the parental home.

Of course, for some who have experienced the parental home in a different way – as a prison (Wardhaugh 1999), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar 1995), or a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine 1995) – performances of 'home' are likely to take on different and contradictory meanings, where normative 'homely' practices are challenged or subverted (Johnston and Valentine 1995). Lynda Johnston and Gill

Valentine (1995) found that lesbians occupying a home built on traditional cultural symbols often subverted them by making structural changes to the house, or creating different ways of living in order to express a non-heterosexual identity. Yet, even in Johnston and Valentine's study, remnants of the parental home still appeared in the present home, producing 'discordant spaces and odd juxtapositions' (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 92) of lesbian identities as well as identities of 'the child' and 'the daughter'. This is a reminder that performances of the home space can take different forms, and while some may be repetitions of 'happy memories', others may subvert more oppressive hauntings of the parental home.

### The 'un-home-like'

A negative point related to the view from the window (looking onto the bins), and the noise that comes with the flat's central location. Katy recalled feeling under surveillance by strangers who could gaze up to her window, leading to her closing the curtains when sitting at her desk. Such elements were referred to as 'un-home-like', making the participant feel 'less-at-home'. This contrasted to her parental home in a quiet, rural area. Rurality in England is bound up with notions of the peaceful idyll, with a home in the country being 'a much sought after commodity' in a space 'distant from the perceived threats posed

by city living' (Cloke, Milbourne and Widdowfield 2000, 79–80). For some, the reality of rural life can be quite different, characterised by isolation, a lack of services, affordable housing, jobs, transport and amenities (Cloke, Milbourne and



Widdowfield 2000). At times, Katy's student home became the 'unfamiliar' or the 'unheimlich': 'It's uncomfortable because you're not familiar with having to deal with the noise'. Such sentiments might be encouraged when notions of the 'ideal home' are held in tension with lived experiences. This contrast might be starker given Katy's comfortable parental home, so that what appears



'un-homely' is influenced by class background. Although this idea cannot be explored in depth within the remit of this paper, exploring further how class might influence what is considered 'un-homely' may be worth pursuing in future studies. Comparisons can be made with Katy Bennett's (2011) work on the concept of feeling 'homeless at home'. The ideal home is that which exists in another place and time: 'At home, I've got a really nice view of a field and it's ... really picturesque and pastoral, and then you've got this ... waste'. This is an 'external myth' (Miller 2010: 98) that is held in tension with the actual ordinary home, which betrays a different set of characteristics and relationships.

While the parental home is held in a nostalgic place, it also becomes the source of feelings of unsettlement when situations arise in the student home that are less than this 'ideal'. Additional responses indicated other insufficiencies: not being allowed pets ('I think that would definitely make you feel more at home'); and the lack of a dining table ('... which doesn't totally for me feel very homely ... It's not very sociable in the kitchen'). According to Bowlby's interpretation of Freud (in Morley 2000), the underbelly of 'homeliness' is the 'unheimlich': the unfamiliar which besets the tranquil vision of home as a place of harmony. The harmony of the student home is undermined by 'intruding forces ... untimely and dislocated

hauntings of other times and places' (Bowlby in Morley 2000: 19).

### Conclusions

This study set out to explore the student home and how it might be experienced beyond its 'bricks and mortar'. It can be stated that the home is not simply a physical place where sleeping, eating, and domestic labour occurs, but a complex space of emotion; an anchor for senses of nostalgia and comfort; a field for playing out social relations; and a site for performing selfhood. This concurs with literature which positions the 'home' beyond its materiality (Easthope 2004). While this study focused on the meanings of a 'student' home for a young, white, undergraduate female student, it understands that identity is highly fragmented, as are meanings of home that follow from this. This particular home was multiple (existing in the past, present and future), reflecting the temporality of the term-time home. This case study suggests opportunities for future research, focusing perhaps, on other strands of identity (class, ethnicity, sexuality, age) and how they interact with understandings of 'home'. Future research would also benefit by exploring how 'home' and the 'un-homely' are understood by other groups: people with experiences of homelessness or domestic violence, for instance.

This paper also aimed to comment on the suitability of visual

methods for reducing the interference of the researcher and attempting to give 'voice' to the participant. Analysis followed Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 86): '... you can do an analysis of the whole but you shouldn't be trying to analyse each creative artefact because that is better done by the person who made it'. I valued first and foremost the interpretation by the participant before considering theory. The analysis process began with the captioning exercise which enabled the participant to add textual explanations to each photograph. However, to give no consideration to the role of myself, as researcher, in presenting and analysing the visual material would be naïve. As Dianne Millen (1997, 3) posits, '... the idea that the research relationship should or ever can be equal in any sense is an illusion'. Regardless of the interpretation placed on the artefact by the participant, the power rests in the hands of the researcher; when writing up the final interpretation, there is a 'double interpretation ... the researcher is providing the interpretation of others' interpretations' (Bryman 2001, 15). This issue remains an unresolved puzzle for researchers employing participatory visual methodologies.

In terms of analysis, I followed the approach articulated by Gold (2004, 1552) which stipulates that images can be integrated with other forms of information to improve sociological work, even if analysis of

the visual is not the central focus. In this case, I integrated the photographs with the participant's captions and interpretations from the interview. Following previous auto-photographic schemes employed by Robert Ziller (1988), I organised the photographs into categories that emerged from the discussion and performed a thematic analysis of the transcript alongside the photographs, guided by my research question. The images helped me to 'see' the social world which the participant inhabits, thus helping to generate themes and then, theoretical insights. The photo-elicitation interview helped to identify images with particularly strong meanings to the participant, which I ensured were included in the presentation of the case study. Although no system of classification can do justice to the levels of meaning in the photographs, the photo-elicitation exercise went some way in helping to take account of the images' complexity and provided the context for my theoretical analysis. An extended study could employ a more reflexive and collaborative method of analysis, enabling the participant to critique or challenge the themes that I had generated. While auto-photography does not completely equalise power relationships, it does go some way to providing tools for better communicating understandings. In the same way that reality is not fully 'knowable', images have no fixed meaning; we cannot expect

them to capture an objective reality (Pink 2001). A challenge to take on board with visual methodologies, as Buckingham (2009) maintains, is that researchers need to develop methods that deal with the visual dimensions of material, rather than falling back on participants' verbal accounts. This may be an analytical issue; the research process of this study was creative so drew different kinds of responses than if the participant was asked to express their views in an interview. The thinking, writing and talking was arguably more lucid because it was inspired by photographs. Since issues around analysis of images in the social sciences is relatively unexplored (Lombard 2012), perhaps future research needs to engage with this debate further: whether it is necessary to develop more robust analytical techniques which are inherently visual.

The visual approach was not without its logistical challenges. It proved to be a resource-intensive and time-consuming method: not such an issue for a small project, but it may have been difficult if replicated on a larger scale. The exercise required commitment by the participant. Seen in a more optimistic light, though, it is an 'enabling methodology' (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 84), which assumes people's creativity. Participation was sustained by the participant, in part, because of her interest in photography. One of the advantages of

auto-photography is its accessibility; the ease of pressing a camera shutter is notable when compared with other participatory visual methods which require greater skill. It is for this reason that auto-photography is a research method increasingly used with children and young people (Jorgenson and Sullivan 2009; Moreland and Cowie 2005; Young and Barrett 2001; Aitken and Wingate 1993). Marisol Clark-Ibanez (2004) successfully used auto-photography and photo-elicitation with children who had never taken a photograph before, but understood the basic instructions to operate a camera and required little supervision. If replicated on a larger scale, the researcher would likely have to employ strategies to maintain involvement for participants with less investment in photography. As Naomi Richards (2011, 4) suggests, the researcher could spend time at the start building confidence about the technicalities of the media (facilitated through workshops); offer a range of prompts if people are in need of stimulation for subject matter; and keep a close eye on people who may be struggling and suggest they try different media.

Katy gave positive feedback of the experience, in terms of allowing her time to consider understandings of 'home', away from judgement:

I think it was a good way of doing it, 'cause when you've got the camera you don't feel like you've

got to be careful of what you're taking pictures of 'cause if I was just to sit here and tell you everything that makes home for me I'd probably change it around a bit because obviously you might feel like it's something that's gonna be immediately judged.

I didn't realise I was going to be this ... cheesy! [Laughs] It's coming from the heart!

The very acknowledgment of this 'cheesiness' – that the words were coming 'from the heart' – speaks volumes about the potential of auto-photography to allow people to share their feelings in ways that other methods do not. This study attempted to add to an existing body of work, which has employed visual methods as instruments of defamiliarisation; in this case, 'the bricks and mortar' of the home were made strange and interesting again. Given my insider status with student life, an expanded study into the meanings of home for students would best be approached using participant-directed visual methods. The core advantage of such methods is in allowing the participant to create original images and ideas, without the presence, influence and interference of the insider-researcher. I remain convinced that the auto-photography and photo-elicitation exercise succeeded in representing the 'common place as strange' (Martin 1999, 7), and emphasised day-to-day visual meanings of 'home' that

may have otherwise remained invisible. Nevertheless, an expanded study could tailor the particular visual tool to each participant, so they have more choice and control over their means of self-expression. Future research need not stop at the visual; there is considerable scope to further address Pink's (2004) call for 'pluri-sensory' methods in exploring the home. This opens up exciting new directions for future fieldwork within the home: engaging with its intangible smells and sounds as well its tangible sights.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Auto-photography, also called 'self-directed photography', refers to photography carried out by the research participant rather than the researcher as part of the research process.
- <sup>2</sup> Photo-elicitation is the notion of inserting a photograph into a research interview and entails the use of photographs to evoke discussion.
- <sup>3</sup> Auto-photography and video diaries are participatory visual methods which hand the control of the (video) camera over to the research participants. Other methods such as drawing and participatory mapping are interactive approaches utilising accessible visual methods in an individual or a group setting.
- <sup>4</sup> The participant was asked to add captions to each photograph to allow for further reflection on their meanings.
- <sup>5</sup> Seventeen photographs were produced, although I shall refer to only a few of them here – particularly those identified as important by the participant.
- <sup>6</sup> The figure of the *flâneur* originates from nineteenth-century Paris and was first characterised by the French poet, Charles Baudelaire (1964 [1863], 9–12). Baudelaire describes the *flâneur* as 'a

passionate spectator of the city', free to wander the streets and observe the crowds. Reflecting on the *flâneur*, Doreen Massey (1991, 47–48) writes how the role was 'irretrievably male', noting the impossibility of a *flâneuse*.

<sup>7</sup> The *unheimlich* or the 'Uncanny' is a Freudian concept for the familiar, yet strange, literally 'unhomely'. In his essay on the 'Uncanny', Freud (1919, 219) established a link between the *unheimlich* and concealment, referring to the 'Uncanny', or the *unheimlich*, as that which 'belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror'. Morley (2000) posits that while the *heimlich* can paradoxically be seen as the realm of homeliness, of the tame, of intimacy, friendliness and comfort, the second meaning of *heimlich* is that of concealment. *Heimlich* thus contains (or is the hidden core of) *unheimlich* because to conceal is the exact opposite of making familiar.

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# Seeing and Telling Households: A Case for Photo Elicitation and Graphic Elicitation in Qualitative Research

Liz Bridger

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*The aim of this paper is to provide a case for using participant-generated photos and diagrams in qualitative interviews. These visual methods are gaining momentum in sociology and the research presented in this paper builds on previous uses of photo elicitation with members of shared households (Heath and Cleaver 2004), couple households (Morrison 2010) and uses of graphic elicitation with family households (Gabb 2010). I draw on data from the early stages of my doctoral research on young adults' living arrangements. This research is investigating households which are comprised of a romantic couple and other unrelated adults, focusing on those in early adulthood in the UK. This paper addresses my use of photos and three diagrammatic activities: relationship maps, timelines and 'household maps'. Through presenting preliminary data, I demonstrate the suitability of photo and graphic elicitation for researching three connected aspects of the social world – relationality, temporality, and spatiality – and discuss the practical and ethical considerations associated with implementing these methods.*

*Keywords: Photo Elicitation, Graphic Elicitation, Visual Methods, Timelines, Relationship Maps, Shared Living, Cohabitation, Youth Transitions*

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## Introduction

### Context

Within a general context of a drive to break down methodological boundaries, there have been calls for the development of visual methods in the social sciences (Harper 1998; Emmison and Smith 2000). Two methods in particular have gained popularity: photo elicitat-

tion and to a lesser extent, graphic elicitation, where photographs and diagrams are used during in-depth spoken interviews. Given the long history of image-based research in the social sciences, and in anthropology in particular (Banks 2007), claims of 'innovation' must be heeded (Wiles et al. 2011). Nevertheless, many researchers are rejecting 'language as the privileged medium for

the creation and communication of knowledge' (Bagnoli 2009, 547) and are experimenting with using images with new groups of people and in different ways. Similarly to other articles which present the novel application of methods in particular contexts (for example, Oliffe and Bottorff 2007; Beilin 2005), the aim of this paper is to provide a case for the utilisation of photo elicitation and graphic elicitation by discussing the early stages of my doctoral research. I am interested in young adults' living arrangements and specifically, the views and experiences of those living in 'couple-shared households' which are comprised of a romantic couple and other unrelated people. This research builds on previous work using photo elicitation in shared households (Heath and Cleaver 2004) and couple households (Morrison 2010) and graphic elicitation with both adults and children in family households (Hanna and Lau Clayton 2012; Gabb 2010). This paper, therefore, contributes to the methodological literature generally by discussing the application of visual methods to an under-researched phenomenon, and more specifically by developing a particular diagrammatic activity I am calling the 'household map'.

### **Perspectives and Approaches**

Despite growing interest in visual methodologies in qualitative sociology, there are of course different epistemological perspectives, rang-

ing from those who believe that *collecting* visual data provides a reproduction of reality to those who believe that *generating* visual data requires an interpretation of reality (Banks 2007). Furthermore, some see 'elicitation' as referring to the creation of data, whether verbal or visual (Varga-Atkins and O'Brien 2009) while others use 'elicitation studies' to refer to the use of images as cues for verbal discussion (Harper 2002). In respect to this research, I have adopted a broadly interpretivist stance and use 'elicitation' to mean the process by which verbal discussion is brought about. That is not to state, however, that I treat images only as a prompt but rather, believe the value of these methods comes from the combination of the verbal and the visual. Another distinction between approaches to both photo and graphic elicitation lies in whether one uses images which have been generated by the researcher or by the participant (Prosser and Loxley 2008). My research is not participatory in the 'action research' sense (where participants are 'involved in every stage of the research process and directly benefit from the outcomes' (Richards 2011a, 1)), but by giving participants different forms of expression, I encourage them to 'take the reins' and steer the direction of the research interview. It is now necessary to outline key terms, processes for implementation and previous uses of each of these methods.

### Photo Elicitation

Photo elicitation was first outlined by anthropologist John Collier (1957; 1967) and a common definition is Douglas Harper's (2002, 13) assertion that this method is 'based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview'. The discussion of photos taken by a participant has been variously described as native image making, photo-voice, photo novellas and visual narratives (Guillemin and Drew 2010), but in this article, the term 'photo elicitation' will be used throughout. A common approach to implementing this method, and that used by Alan Radley et al. (2005), involves several stages: conducting an initial interview with a participant then giving a brief for taking photos; the participant taking photos over a specified period of time (and researchers developing them); and finally meeting the participant to discuss the photos. This second interview would be likely to include questions about why each photo was taken, what it represents and which photo best exemplifies the participants' thoughts and experiences (Radley and Taylor 2003).

Photo elicitation has been used to research topics ranging from men's experience of cancer (Oliffe and Bottorff 2009) to agricultural farming (Beilin 2005) but it is also an appropriate method for researching shared households (Heath and Cleaver 2004), couple households (Morrison 2010) as well as every-

day routines, ideas of home (Radley 2005), youth transitions and imagined futures (Woodley-Baker 2009). Asking participants to visually represent their experiences of living arrangements offers a number of benefits. For the researcher, this method may provide: representations of how sociality and emotional closeness can be manifest in the spatial and material; greater access to 'the private' not usually available in research situations; and 'the film of the book' – a confirmation of (group or individual) interview themes (Heath and Cleaver 2004). For the participant, this method affords more autonomy and the opportunity to put topics on the agenda (Morrison 2010). Sue Heath and Elizabeth Cleaver's (2004) experiment in photo elicitation with two of their 25 households and Carey-Ann Morrison's (2010) 'self-directed photography' undertaken by female participants have been a major influence on my methodological approach. There is, nevertheless, the opportunity to develop these methods by building photo elicitation into a research design for all participants – both men and women – and by taking advantage of technological developments in the last decade.

### Graphic Elicitation

The term 'graphic elicitation' refers to the use of diagrams as stimuli in research interviews (Bagnoli 2009). Despite potential similarities with photo elicitation, this method

is less well-established in the social sciences but nevertheless worthy of consideration in its own right (Crilly, et al. 2006). It has been argued that diagrammatic methods have three core features: simplifying complex ideas; verbal and visual components, and clear structures and conventions (Varga-Atkins and O'Brien 2009). It is important to consider the use of diagrams for graphic elicitation in the context of arts-based methods as graphic elicitation may also be seen to include self-portraits (Bagnoli 2009), expressive drawing (Guillemin and Drew 2010) and collage and memory books (Rose 2012). As Tunde Varga-Atkins and Mark O'Brien (2009) argue, however, diagrams are more structured than drawings, but less so than tables and lists. Furthermore, the way this method is employed can range from quite directive instructions to broad guidance as a form of 'scaffolding' (Prosser and Loxley 2008).

Graphic elicitation has been used to study areas such as chronic illness (Forbes 1999) and student learning (Hay et al. 2007), as well as topics related to my research interests, including life course transitions (Hanna and Lau-Clayton 2012) and interpersonal relationships (Roseneil 2006). In my own research, I am inviting participants to take part in three particular diagrammatic activities: relationship maps and timelines which are relatively well established in qualitative research, as well as a technique I am

developing called 'household maps'. Firstly, relationship maps aim to visually represent emotional closeness or demarcate interpersonal relationships (Bagnoli 2009). The implementation of this method can vary widely, from using a structured approach of pre-drawn circles (see Roseneil 2006; Pahl and Spencer 2004), to using the metaphor of the solar system (see Jossleson 1996) to allowing participants to openly interpret the activity (Hanna and Lau-Clayton 2012). Researchers have argued that a visual element makes research more accessible and engaging for children and young people (Gabb 2010), although such techniques were first used in the context of participatory research with adults (Clarke 2011). Secondly, timelines have been used where ideas of biography, chronology and narrative are particularly important and it has been argued that timelines biographically situate current experiences, condense a life history and reveal 'turning points' (Hanna and Lau Clayton 2012).

With regards to my development of 'household maps', I acknowledge that 'there is a long history of participatory mapping of places' (Emmel 2008, 1) where researchers have asked participants to draw maps of local neighbourhoods and community spaces (O'Campo et al. 2009). I, however, am interested in the mapping of domestic spaces and Jacqui Gabb's 'emotion map' with family households has been very in-

fluent on my own methodological approach. In order to 'visually map the affective geography of families' interactions' (Gabb 2010, 44), she asked participants to draw up floor plans of their home and represent interactions by using coloured stickers to signify family members and happy, sad, or angry faces or love hearts to signify emotion. However, I think that boundaries and the intersection between the public and private are particularly interesting in the context of households where ideas of 'family', home, intimacy and privacy may be more complex. Maps of domestic spaces also arose in Heath and Cleaver's (2004) research on shared households when they sketched the locations of their interviews (see Heath and Cleaver 2004, 69) and in Morrison's (2010) research on couple households when a participant included in her solicited diary a sketch representing the spatiality of love in her home (see Morrison 2010, 145). However, developments can be made by using participatory visual methods to explore household members' perceptions of their use of space and by building this method into the design for all participants.

The following section will provide the context for my research on young adults' living arrangements by discussing the socio-political climate, social theory and previous research, and will outline my aims and methodology. The main body of the paper will address my use of

photo elicitation and graphic elicitation in turn; I will then reflect on data generated in the early stages of my fieldwork and practical and ethical considerations.

### **'Couple-shared Households'**

#### **Socio-political and Theoretical Context**

It has been observed that long-term trends and recent changes are impacting young adults' transitions to independent housing (Berrington 2012). These long term trends may be associated with the 'macro' such as a weakened youth labour market, changes in the structure and cost of Higher Education (HE), and associated with the 'micro' such as a delay in family formation (Clapham et al. 2010). However, more recently, in the context of economic recession and the Coalition government's subsequent welfare cuts, there have been restrictions on mortgage credit, the momentous rise in the Private Rental Sector (PRS) and a shortage of social housing (Berrington 2012). Home-ownership is still an important aspiration for many young adults (Clapham et al. 2010) but greater proportions remain in the PRS (Heath 2008). The average age of first-time buyers has been reported as 35 (Hall 2012) and it has been found that young adults are increasingly reliant on support from family members to finance home-ownership and independent living (Heath and

Calvert 2013). Recent headlines declare ‘UK Housing Shortage Turning Under-30s into ‘Generation Rent’ (Ramesh 2012) and ‘Boomerang Generation Boosted by High House Prices, Rents and Graduate Debt’ (Cowie 2012). Importantly, the Shared Accommodation Rate, which limited housing benefit for under-25s to the cost of a room in a shared house when it was originally established in 1996, was extended to single under-35s in 2012 (Rugg 2010). It must be remembered that transitions to independent living are not clear-cut and vary significantly with regards to gender, ethnicity, and particularly, class – those from a middle-class background and/or those who attend HE are likely to leave home earlier but more likely to return (Heath 2008).

It is in this socio-political context that my interest in young adults’ domestic relationalities arose – that is, the different interpersonal relationships which occur within the home between people in early adulthood. The term ‘young adults’ domestic relationalities’ encompasses a range of concepts relating to vast and complex bodies of literature and I will briefly break down the key themes of my research. Firstly, the term ‘young adults’ is not as unproblematic as it may first seem. Traditional markers of ‘adulthood’ – such as employment, marriage and independent living – are being called into question as these statuses are impermanent and reversible (Wyn and White

1997; Henderson et al. 2007). It has been argued that transitions from youth to adulthood have become increasingly protracted, complex, and diverse (Jones 2005) and should not be seen as a shift from dependence to independence but as a shift in interdependencies (Lahelma and Gordon 2003). Particularly, transitions are seen as extended (Furlong and Cartmel 1997) with terms such as ‘adultsecent’ and ‘Peter Pan generation’ used in the media (for example, Power 2012). I view the different strands of transitions – from school to work, from the parental home to independent living and from family of origin to a family of one’s own (Coles 1995) – as interconnected (Thomson et al. 2002), and I am particularly interested in the connections between the two latter strands (Bridger 2011).

Secondly, the term ‘domestic relationalities’ is used to signify a range of relationships of varying degrees of closeness within a household setting. I draw on sociological theories of ‘personal life’ (Smart 2007) and intimacy (Jamieson 1998) to encompass relationships beyond ‘the family’ (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). My work builds on that of Heath and Cleaver (2003; Heath 2002) who have explored the range of relationships within shared houses: from partner to friend to housemate to lodger to colleague<sup>1</sup>. These themes relate also to the core issue of sociology: the relationship between the individual and society: a person’s

ability to exercise agency within social structures (Wright Mills 1959). I am interested in how relationships, living arrangements and 'transitions to adulthood' reflect choice, constraint and the intersection of the two.

### Previous Research

In order to explore the themes of relationalities, transitions to adulthood and choice and constraint, I am investigating a very specific phenomenon: households which include a couple and other people. I am operationalizing a 'couple-shared household' as a romantic dyad and other unrelated adults who live in the same residence and I am focusing on those in early adulthood (aged between 18 and mid-30s<sup>2</sup>). This arrangement may occur in shared houses in the PRS or where homeowners have lodgers. This phenomenon links together two bodies of literature. Firstly, it involves research on couple households, which shows that the proportions of young people living as a couple increases with age (Berrington et al. 2010) and that cohabitation may be undertaken for a range of both practical and emotional reasons (Sassler and Miller 2011) (see also Haskey 2001; Syltevik 2010).

Secondly, it links research on shared households which shows that it is increasingly likely that young people will live in a shared household at some point in their lives (Heath 1999), although expe-

riences of this living arrangement can vary significantly for 'white collar' workers sharing high quality accommodation with friends, and 'blue collar' workers sharing low quality Houses of Multiple Occupation with strangers (Rugg 2010). An issue with previous research, however, is that marriage and cohabitation are often unquestioningly understood as referring to couples who do not live with others, whilst research on 'shared living' has not addressed the existence of romantic couples *within* shared households<sup>3</sup>.

There has been limited research that touches upon the conflation of couple households and shared households. Non-academic research has suggested that the number of young home-owner couples letting rooms to lodgers has risen in the last 10 years (lv.com 2011); has indicated that the number of couples looking for rooms in rented house-shares has increased, particularly since 2010 (easyroommate.com 2011); and has found that, of couples looking for rooms in shared houses, 58% would like to rent alone but can't afford it, 19% would like to buy alone but can't afford it and 12% enjoy the social aspect of shared living (spareroom.co.uk 2012). To date, I have found two pieces of academic research which discuss couple-shared households: firstly, a piece aiming to understand the practices and meanings of shared living in Sydney (McNamara and Connell 2007) with around one fifth of the



sample of households including a couple. They discussed intimacies generally (as did Heath and Cleaver (2003) and Heath (2002)) but did not specifically address this dynamic between couples and housemates. The second piece is a doctoral thesis by Morrison at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, exploring the everyday geographies of young heterosexual couples' love in the home (Morrison 2010). Around a third of the couples interviewed lived with housemates and the author described the difficulties faced by the couples (such as disrupted privacy) and by the other housemates (such as a lack of agency). These dynamics, however, were not the focus of the work.

### **Aims and Methodology**

My research, therefore, aims to address a gap in the sociological knowledge-base and contribute to theoretical debates by establishing the prevalence of, and reasons for living in, households which are comprised of a couple and other adults. I aim to understand couple-shared households in relation to three core themes: different kinds of relationships, transitions to adulthood, and the complexities of individual choice and structural constraints. In order to answer these research questions I am using a mixed-method longitudinal research design. Firstly, secondary quantitative analysis is being undertaken using data from the Labour Force Survey to answer

questions about the prevalence of couple-shared households and the characteristics of individuals within them.

My primary method of data generation, however, is in-depth qualitative interviews with around twenty people aged between 18 and mid-30s in the Yorkshire region who either live with their partner and housemates/lodgers, or who live with a couple. I am sampling at the individual level rather than the household level<sup>4</sup>. The in-depth semi-structured interviews involve asking participants to provide a brief housing biography, asking about their views and experiences of their current living arrangement, and their plans for the future. This also includes the option for participants to complete three diagrammatic tasks: relationship maps, timelines and household maps (Hanna and Lau-Clayton 2012; Gabb 2009) and the option to take photos and discuss them with me (Harper 2002). It is these visual methods which will be the focus of this paper. Based on initial qualitative analysis, a strategic sub-sample will be invited to take part in follow-up interviews around 3–5 months after their first interview. The analysis of this qualitative data will involve the synthesis of the verbal and visual as well as cross-cutting and longitudinal themes. This research is currently in the early stage of data generation, with around a quarter of interviews having been completed.

### Seeing and Telling 'Couple-shared Households'

The following section will present some of the visual data generated in the early stages of my fieldwork. It must be emphasised that this project is on-going and my discussions of these photographs and diagrams are, therefore, tentative. That said, the experience of critically reviewing my methodological approaches and techniques at this stage has not only been useful for my reflexive practice, but reading about these initial experiences may also be useful for others. For both photo elicitation and graphic elicitation, I present data around three main themes within my research then share my experiences of using these methods in terms of practical and ethical considerations. Firstly, I am interested in *relationality*: the inherent interconnectedness of human experiences and the importance of different kinds of relationships in people's everyday lives (Budgeon 2006; Smart 2007). Secondly, I am interested in *temporality*: not only biographical, generational and historical time (Adam et al. 2008) but also daily, weekly and monthly routines. Lastly, I am interested in *spatiality*, where physical space is seen not only as the location of social interaction but as constructed through social interaction (Moss and Richter 2010). While these themes – which Mason (2002, 15) identifies as 'ontological properties' – have been separated out in order to provide

structure for my early analysis, it is of course recognised that space, time and relationships are not discrete categories. This section will, therefore, discuss the usefulness of photo and graphic elicitation for investigating these three aspects of the social world generally, and for investigating couple-shared households specifically.

### Photo Elicitation

#### Sharing Preliminary Data

I have found the discussion of participants' photos a good route into asking about social dynamics and emotional closeness. Several of the people I have spoken to so far live with friends they knew prior to living together. For instance, one participant had moved in with some friends who are a couple. When asked which of her photos best represented her experiences of living with a couple and living with friends, she said:

*'I think maybe the fridge one because it represents them keeping an eye on me and looking after me, us having shared friends and shared interests that are outside the house as well as inside the house ... sort of being a bit crafty and creative with the fridge poetry ... (see figure 1).*

This one image links to several dimensions of the kind of relationships present in this house: the im-



Figure 1: Photo of a fridge



Figure 2: Photo of a shelf

portance of being able to rely on one another for practical and emotional support, the importance of being part of a wider social circle and the importance of having things in common beyond sharing a roof. This, therefore, shows the potential for photo elicitation in answering my research questions about young adults' understandings and experiences of relationalities within couple-shared households.

Another of my themes is about uses of space within couple-shared households and the material aspect of this living arrangement. One of my participants owned her house with

her husband and had let out rooms to friends and lodgers for over 10 years. When describing one of her photos (see figure 2), she said:

*It's a shelf with a load of handbags and it's in the hallway bit outside my bedroom ... and the reason I took it was the sort of space issue of sharing your house with loads of other people ... As we have reduced the number of tenants storage has become less of an issue but there was one point where we had big bookcases on landings and stuff was just everywhere basically! So it's the last remaining*

*sort of ... communal space storage'.*

As well as practical issues, another aspect of spatiality relates to boundaries and issues of privacy. For example, figure 3 is of a doorway: a physical and symbolic boundary:

*That's the door up to John and Sarah's room ... I guess it's the one bit of the house that's their personal space so I don't go in very much but it's usually open so I'll often yell up for a chat when they get in in the evenings ...*



Figure 3: Photo of door

This photo in particular highlights the interconnection between the physical, material and emotional as Heath and Cleaver (2004) suggested.

Photos might also be used to capture daily routines. Another participant had moved into a house share and subsequently formed a relationship with her housemate. When asked about this photo (see figure 4), she said, *'This is my mug – special mug – and this is one of [my boyfriends'] mugs ... that's my evening mug ...'* *'But yes this is another normal evening activity, drinking camomile tea ...'* Similarly to Radley et al.'s (2005) use of photo elicitation to capture key points in participants' days, images such as these offer a way into in-depth discussions about this living arrangement in relation to time and routine.

These observations give an idea of the ways in which I am using pho-



Figure 4: Photo of mugs

to elicitation to gain a deeper understanding of young adults' experiences of living in a couple-shared household. One of my main reasons for using photo elicitation is epistemological: compared with interviews involving only spoken language, it is argued that photo elicitation interviews 'produce a different kind of information' (Harper 2002, 13), generate richer data (Meo 2010) and access meanings which would have otherwise been 'dormant' (Clarke-Ibanez 2004). This is seen to stem from a combination of the verbal and the visual. For example, Figure 1 demonstrates the value of having two modes of expression: the participant's account is far richer for being able to describe and show different dimensions of closeness with her housemates. In closing comments of another interview, one participant said '*I do like that photo because it has a lot more to it than is on the surface*'. As Sarah Pink (2007, 28) argues, photography offers the benefit of inspiring 'people to *represent* and then *articulate* embodied and material experiences that they do not usually recall in verbal interviewing' (my emphasis).

Other reasons for choosing photo elicitation may seem at first paradoxical. Firstly, (depending on the cultural context) people tend to be comfortable taking photos and as Guillemin and Drew (2010, 179) note, 'sophisticated cameras are now standard features of mobile phones; being able to take a pho-

to anywhere, anytime is now often taken for granted'. As such, creating photos for a research project is a task which participants often report as enjoyable, fun and engaging (Meo 2010). The selection of images I have received thus far includes photos of the results of a baking project, a photogenic cat and a scenic view from a window – images you might imagine people posting on facebook or instagram. I would argue, therefore, that drawing on extant social practices and everyday modes of meaning-making is likely to generate naturalistic data. Some commentators argue, however, that asking a participant to look at, analyse, question, and justify their own photographs is a way of creating distance from the everyday (Rose 2012) and 'making the familiar strange' (Mannay 2010). This may, therefore, draw out reflections and articulations not otherwise elicited in a traditional verbal interview. This paradox that photography may be seen as an everyday social practice which may also create distance from the everyday is something I continue to reflect on as I move through the research process.

### **Sharing Initial Experiences**

With regards to practicalities of employing photo elicitation, it has been agreed that the tasks involved in photo elicitation – including setting up cameras, solving technical problems, developing photos and indexing photos – is time-consum-

ing, expensive and demanding (Meo 2010). Given the technological developments in recent years, however, photographic research need not be seen as so problematic (Clarke-Ibanez 2004). I am aiming to take advantage of the estimation that in the UK, around 62% of internet users aged over 16 own a smart phone (Mintel 2012a) and around 78% own a digital camera (Mintel 2012b). While others have assumed that participant-generated photo elicitation involves the researchers providing a disposable or digital camera (Rose 2012), in my research I am recognising the technological advancements since Heath and Cleavers' (2004) research conducted in the late 1990s. Therefore, I am giving participants the choice of using their own camera phone or digital camera if they have one, or using a disposable camera which I can provide. If they use their own camera, they have the choice of sending the photos by email or picture text message (as Morrison (2010) footnoted, 3 of her 14 participants offered to do this). Furthermore, this approach involves simply reimbursing participants for the occasional cost of MMS text messaging, thereby reducing costs of cameras and postage. So far I have found that participants assumed they would use their own device but of course I recognise that not all young adults will own a camera-phone or digital camera. Despite developments in technology, this method is still more

time-consuming than traditional verbal interviews. The laborious organisation of photographic data is unavoidable and I have come to learn that having to number photos, to organise digital and paper archives, to remember to state the number of the photo during the audio-recorded interview, and to subsequently make sense of verbal and visual data concurrently, are practical issues that come with the territory of photo elicitation.

A detailed discussion of ethical considerations may be beyond the scope of this piece (although see Clarke 2012) but there are several pertinent issues. For example, it could be seen that asking for a window into personal domestic spaces oversteps a cultural boundary (Heath and Cleaver 2004) and Pink (2007, 28) argues that:

When doing [ethnographic] research in intimate contexts like the home the use of visual media and methods creates new ethical and practical dilemmas as the camera enters personal domains that might not normally be the object of public scrutiny.

Marisol Clarke-Ibanez (2004) observed that this level of intimacy may render recruitment more difficult, making processes of informed consent particularly important. In my research, where I am recruiting at the individual level rather than at the household level, I have to make it

explicit to participants that in order to photograph the house or people in it for the purposes of my project, they must gain consent from those they live with. While I considered seeking written consent from all housemates and drew up an information sheet aimed at those living with a participant, following Katherine Davies' (2008) advice from working with family photo albums, I concluded that it was reasonable to leave the main participant with the responsibility to gain consent from those not involved directly with the project. This links to the issues of anonymity, ownership and publication which are pertinent in visual methods (Banks 2007). Following the guidance of the British Sociology Society Visual Sociology Study Group (BSA 2006), I have clearly stated to participants

that they legally own the photos they take and then may agree to allow me to reproduce them in different domains. I have adapted Analia Inés Meo's (2010) approach to consent by using a form which lists each photo a participant has taken by number, and gives them the opportunity to clearly specify which photos need to be anonymised and in what forum they may be published (my thesis, an academic forum or a public forum).

### Graphic Elicitation

### Sharing Preliminary Data

I will now turn to my experience of using diagrammatic activities in research interviews: relationship maps, timelines and household maps. As aforementioned, the use

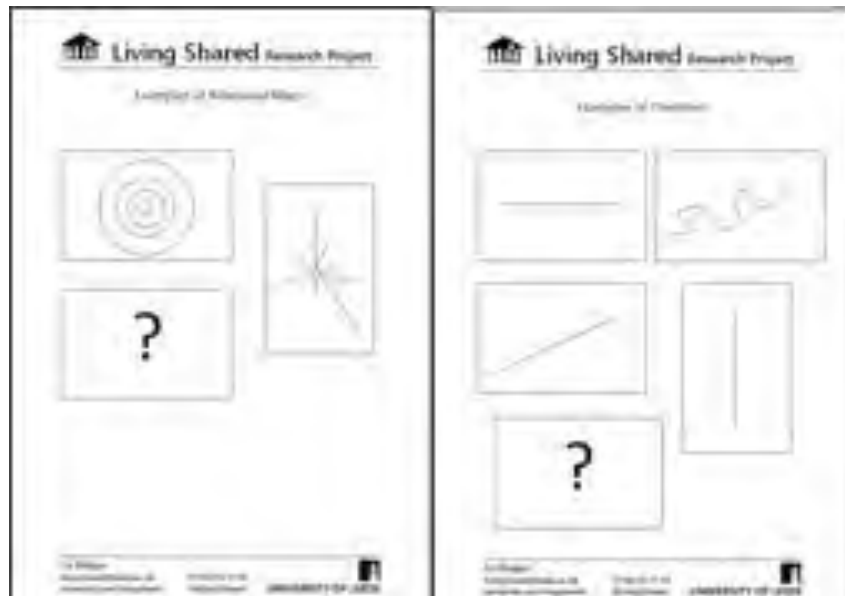


Figure 5: Examples of relationship maps and timelines

of relationship maps is fairly well-established in the social sciences. Following Jane Elliot's (2012) advice, I am providing participants with examples of the kinds of relationship maps they might draw (see figure 5). I have found the traditional concentric circle approach particularly useful as it allows me to ask participants why they have placed different people in each layer to further understand participants' ideas about the difference between a housemate and friend, for instance. This method in itself may be quite flexible: one of my participants who was not born in the UK used 'satellite bubbles' to represent geographical location as well as emotional closeness (see figure 6). However, other participants preferred to take the 'mind map' approach where groups of friends or family members could be clustered (and perhaps colour-coded) (see figure 7).

As discussed above, timelines are useful for understanding significant events and turning points (Hanna and Lau-Clayton 2012) but I am interested in the various and interconnected strands of transitions to adulthood (Thomson, et al. 2002). Following Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's (1997, 60) observation that 'life stories can be structured by an infinite number of themes' and Heath and Cleaver's (2003) use of housing biographies, I am asking participants to draw timelines showing the different houses they have lived in and the people they have lived with. Once this main structure has been drawn, I then ask if they would like to add other important points relating to relationships, family, education, work or anything else. This allows me to understand a participant's housing pathway in their wider biographical context. For instance, one participant added

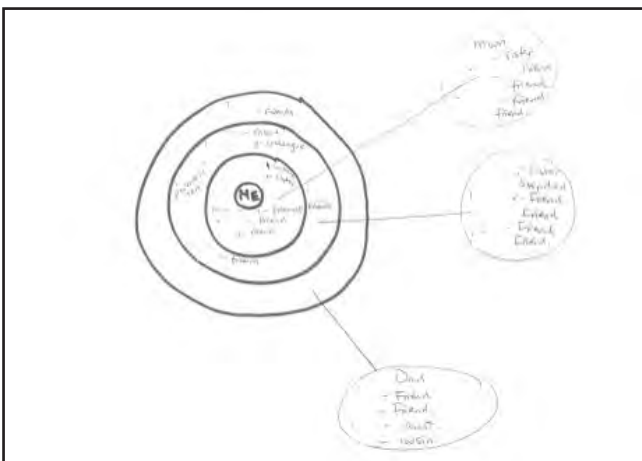


Figure 6: Relationship map



Figure 7: Relationship map





they have lived first, then summarise this onto a timeline, as this gives the participant time to think through the most important events before committing pen to paper, and gives me time to think about points upon which I would like to follow-up. While this method does not capture all scales of temporality (such as daily, weekly, and monthly routines) and is limited by a linear conceptualisation of time (Bagnoli 2009), this activity does situate the discussion of a participants' current situation in the context of their life story.

Finally, I am developing the 'household map' as a more appropriate way for adults to 'spatially locate relational encounters' (Gabb 2009, 7), given that art-based activities such as Gabb's (2010) emotion maps have been described as having connotations of childishness (Guillemin and Drew 2010). During the interview, I ask participants to

draw a floor plan of their home on a piece of card (see figure 10). Then, by overlaying sheets of acetate and providing participants with different coloured permanent markers, I can probe for further information by asking a range of different questions. This method is still in the early stages of development, but I have found that asking where household members tend to spend their time on an average evening to be particularly interesting (figure 11). For example, whether a home-owning couple tends to spend evenings in the living room while their tenants spend time in their bedrooms, or whether a couple and their housemates spend their evenings cooking together and watching films, could say something about the potential range of dynamics within couple-shared households. With varying results, as a form of episodic interviewing (Harding 2006), I am also

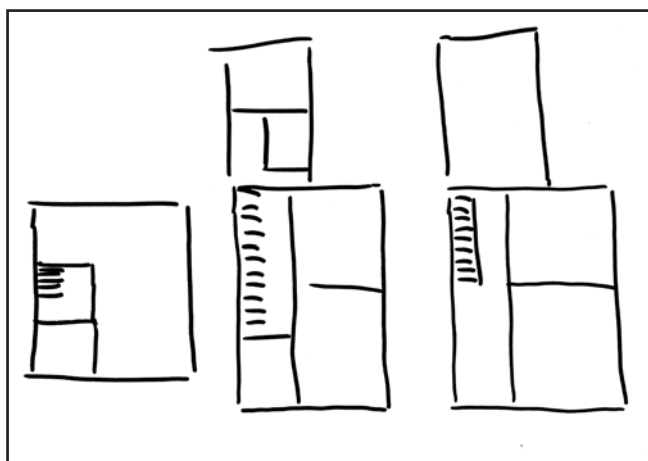


Figure 10: Floor plan for household map.

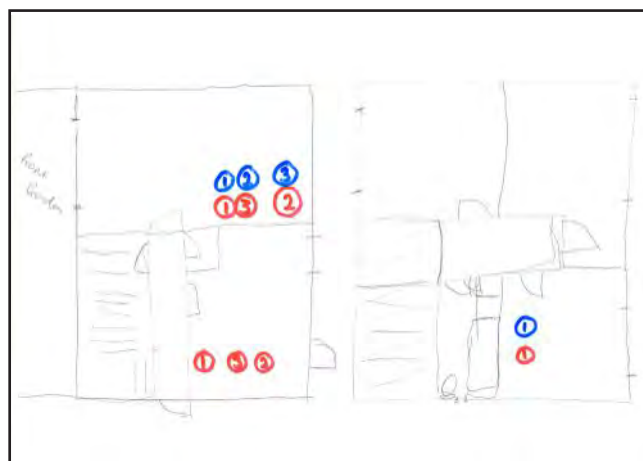


Figure 11: Completed household map.

asking participants to map specific events such as a particular positive and a particular negative situation. This is, however, a flexible method and can be adapted to allow participants to visually represent what is relevant to them. For example, one participant discussed what she called ‘the sofa situation’ – that she and her boyfriend usually sat on one sofa while their housemates sat on the other – and offered to draw this on the household map. So while this method may well evolve into a quite different technique, I believe the ‘household map’ offers a potentially very useful way of allowing participants to articulate and represent their thoughts and experiences of living in a couple-shared household.

One of the reasons I chose to use graphic elicitation was the epistemological richness offered. Proponents of this method argue that diagrammatic activities offer ‘a different way into the research question ... and engage the brain in a different way, drawing on a different kind of response’ (Guantless and Holzwarth 2006, 84). This is seen as helpful when discussing issues which may be difficult to put into words. In terms of sensitive topics, graphic elicitation may allow participants to ‘express the unsayable’ and use images and labels in place of discussion (Guillemin and Drew 2010, 187) or may allow researchers to broach sensitive issues (Hanna and Lau Clayton 2012). For example, in one interview, the drawing of a time-

line allowed for the conversation to come back to a past relationship, which otherwise the participant may not have brought up, or which I may not have asked about. Furthermore, graphic elicitation may also allow participants to represent that which is difficult to put into words such as the abstract (for example, complex family relationships (Gabb 2010) and the literal (for example, the layout of domestic space (Gabb 2010) or local community geography (Emmel 2009))). In each of these examples, it may be seen that an advantage of graphic elicitation is the combination of visual meaning, written meaning and spoken meaning. I am certainly finding this flexibility of expression to be one of the strengths of graphic elicitation.

### **Sharing Initial Experiences**

With regards to practical considerations, graphic elicitation does not involve the same technical issues as photo elicitation. There are, however, other areas of concern such as the location of the interview and the time allocated to complete it. Firstly, there are many issues to consider when the location of an interview is negotiated generally (Elwood and Martin 2000) and, for graphic elicitation interviews, the setting must be conducive to paper-based drawing activities for each participant – some people may feel perfectly comfortable engaging in such activities in a public café for instance, whilst others might feel more self-

conscious. Also, given that people engage with graphic activities to differing degrees (Guillemin and Drew 2010), it can be difficult to anticipate how long an interview may last. For instance, one participant seemed to particularly 'click' with the diagrammatic approach and offered to produce several ad hoc diagrams in addition to the standard three, while another declined the invitation to complete a household map.

With regards to ethical issues, it has been noted that the usual guidance around informed consent, anonymisation, safe storage of data, and the right to withdraw are equally applicable to diagrammatic activities (Emmel 2008) but there are several pertinent points. For example, the anonymisation of data might be achieved through pseudonyms for textual data and through blurring faces for photographic data but a combination of approaches is needed for graphic data. Furthermore, given that diagrams may be used to express ideas which might be difficult to put into words, care must be taken about minimising potential emotional harm to participants (Guillemin and Drew 2010). For example, with the relationship map, I found that one participant said she had come to terms with the fact that her biological father was not in the 'inner ring' but others may find this classification upsetting. Furthermore, another participant who described themselves as having a severe mental health issue

declined the invitation to complete the future timeline because they felt their future was too uncertain. This clearly shows the need for sensitivity when asking people to express themselves by committing pen to paper.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this paper has provided a case for photo elicitation and graphic elicitation by discussing the use of these methods in the early stages of a doctoral research project. I am building on previous uses of photo elicitation with members of shared households (Heath and Cleaver 2004) and couple households (Morrison 2010), and on uses of graphic elicitation with family households (Gabb 2010). This paper contributes to the methodological knowledge-base by sharing experiences of using photo elicitation with a new group – households which include a couple and other unrelated adults – and in the current technological context. It also makes a contribution by sharing data generated through a new diagrammatic activity, the household map, developed to gain a deeper understanding of how adults perceive their use of space in a complex living arrangement.

Through demonstrating my experience of using photo and graphic elicitation in new ways and with a new sample, in this paper I have suggested the ways in which these methods may be useful for

researching three interlinked dimensions of the social world: temporality, relationality and spatiality. Photos may capture daily routines while timelines situate experiences in their biographical and historical context; photos may capture signifiers of emotional closeness (or lack thereof) while relationship maps situate experiences in their relational context; and photos may capture representations of space and boundaries while household maps situate experiences in their physical context. However, I have also raised issues which may be of interest to all qualitative researchers interested in visual methods. In terms of epistemological considerations, I have shown that visual methods have the potential to generate different kinds of information to traditional verbal methods. On the one hand, it could be argued that using images as prompts encourages discussions which are more in-depth and nuanced, whilst on the other hand, it could be argued that the photos and diagrams themselves represent meaning in a different way and should be analysed as data in and of themselves. In my own research, I believe that techniques which use visual, spoken and written expression are greater than the sum of their parts.

Another important issue relates to the practicalities of employing photo and graphic elicitation. With the groups with which I am working, I have been able to take advantage

of relatively high ownership rates of camera phones and digital cameras, and have considered the opportunities opened up to researchers by technological advancements and cultures of photo-sharing. With regards to ethics, it is important to consider Jennifer Mason's (2002) observation that the more multi-dimensional the methods of data generation are, the greater the risks. As such, I have briefly considered the ways in which usual ethical issues are pertinent to visual methods: the need to explicitly negotiate informed consent around processes of anonymisation and reprinting, and the need for particular sensitivity when asking participants to commit pen to paper.

I have suggested novel ways of using these methods but there are several ways my ideas could be developed. For example, I have discussed photo and graphic elicitation as two separate methods but it may be worth considering bringing different forms of visual information into conversation with each other, such as by encouraging participants to reflect on the correspondence between their diagrams and photos. Such integration is common-place at the formal stage of data analysis (Rose 2012) but unfortunately a detailed discussion of the analysis of verbal and visual data lies beyond the scope of this paper (see Pink 2007). What I have found, however, is that embracing the epistemological complexity of spoken, photo-

graphic and diagrammatic information does not make the on-going practical and ethical considerations any easier. These are issues which must be iteratively negotiated throughout the research process, and issues I continue to grapple with as I move beyond the initial stages of my fieldwork. Nevertheless, by going through this process I not only hope to offer a theorisation of an under-researched living arrangement and offer a contribution to wider sociological debates, but I also hope to adapt and trial new methodological tools in order to develop the sociological toolbox.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Another doctoral researcher is currently exploring the ways in which relationalities in shared households may be considered distinct from friends or family (Richards 2011b)
- <sup>2</sup> The upper age limit of ‘mid-thirties’ was chosen in order to reflect sociological ideas as well as the changes in housing benefit policy: namely, conceptualisations of adulthood as protracted (Kenyon 2002) and the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate to single under-35s (Rugg 2010) respectively. This is consistent with previous research on young adults’ living arrangements (Heath and Cleaver 2003; Berrington et al. 2009).
- <sup>3</sup> Heath and Cleaver (2003, 194) acknowledged the existence of couples within shared households but excluded those ‘connected by marriage, cohabitation or family’ from their sample in order to draw boundaries.
- <sup>4</sup> The decision to sample at the individual level rather than the household level was taken for several reasons: to make recruitment easier, to increase the likelihood of accessing a range of people with varying degrees of satisfaction with their living arrangement (Heath and Cleaver 2003), and to avoid the ethical issues associated with interviewing groups with existing and on-going relationships (Bloor et al. 2001).

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# Using Participatory and Visual Methods to Address Power and Identity in Research with Young People

Joanne Hill

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*Research with young people and children has developed over a number of years an argument for researching with, rather than on, younger participants (Thomson, 2008; Valentine, 1999). In qualitative research, the ways in which we carry out empirical research, the relationships that are developed between researchers and participants, the knowledge that is produced and the epistemological and theoretical foundations can be affected by how as powerful researchers we aim to observe and analyse. Where age, gender and ethnicity intersect in creating something of a “difference” between researcher and participants, these issues can need greater consideration. This paper presents some methodological background to the choices made concerning data production during a project in which a white, female, late-20s researcher with a feminist theoretical background investigated physical activity engagement by a diverse cohort of 13-14 year old students in an inner city secondary school in the Midlands, UK. By combining visual ethnography, interviews and collaborative photography, the project aimed to address concerns about student voice in research with young people on their school and sport experiences (O’Sullivan & MacPhaill, 2010). The paper considers some possibilities and challenges of using this methodology within school-based studies. Reflections from this project are offered on the ways in which participants retained power over content and meaning of their photographic contributions, and researcher relationships in the field. Visual methods are argued to offer an additional tool in tackling traditional power relations and encouraging participant investment.*

*Keywords: Participatory photography, Youth, Embodiment, Power, Ethnography.*

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Images can act as powerful indicators regarding the multiple meanings embedded within our cultures (Phoenix 2010, 93).

Young people’s low or decreasing participation in physical education (PE) and sport has been a longstanding concern both in

schools and in the academic field. Increasingly, academic research is looking to ideas of embodiment and the effect of bodily norms on identity to understand young people's disengagement or marginalisation in the subject (Azzarito & Sterling 2010; Oliver, et al. 2009; Wright 1995). Calls have been made to engage more deeply in investigations of students' embodied experiences of physical activity and sports (Armour 1999), which might be achieved through listening to young people's voices. At the same time, researchers have commonly used multiple methods, such as those employed within ethnography, and increasingly visual methods, in order to see as well as listen to those multiple meanings of which Cassandra Phoenix (2010) reminds us. Part of living embodied in society, for sighted individuals, involves negotiating the world visually, and images are constantly present in culture and society (Banks 2007; Knowles and Sweetman 2004). Experiences in school may be informed by engagements with physical and visual cultures (Kirk 1999). Images and ways of seeing have been key areas for research into the hidden curriculum, powerful because of their effects being unnoticed (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Prosser 2007). In qualitative research, the relationships that are developed between researchers and participants, the knowledge that is produced and the epistemological and theoretical foundations

can be affected by how, as powerful researchers, we aim to observe and analyse.

Within this field, I undertook a project aiming to explore how young people's constructions of bodies that have high status affected their own identities and engagement in PE and sport. Initially interested in gendered bodily norms, I became aware that a lack of intersectional research in the area meant the experiences of minority ethnic young people were being ignored and whiteness normalised (Flintoff et al. 2011). Engagement with visual cultural resources through sports media may inform students' participation in school PE. For instance, this is addressed by Joanne Hill and Laura Azzarito (2012) in examining ethnic minority girls' perceptions that sport is 'not for me' where they are surrounded at school by images of male, white, muscular sports stars. Working with a group of 13-14 year old students in an urban secondary school in the East Midlands, UK, I combined multiple methods including participant observation, researcher- and participant-produced photographs and group interviews. Fourteen boys and eleven girls consented to participate; approximately 80 per cent of them were British Indian<sup>1</sup>; others were white British, black African or of dual heritage. All took part in mixed ability, single-sex PE lessons for two hours a week. I engaged in observations of PE classes and created my own

photographic record of visual culture in the school, such as posters on noticeboards. Participants were interviewed in small groups about their constructions of bodies that have high status in PE and sport, then they were each loaned a digital camera to create photos that visualised their experiences in PE and sport and their perceptions of bodies that have status or are admired. After two weeks, cameras were collected back and prints of their photos were shared in a second round of group interviews in which participant-photographers were asked to explain their photos.

As a white, female, late-20s researcher (and not a PE teacher), I had few commonalities of identity with the participant group as a whole. This invited a consideration of difference and identity in designing and producing social research across lines of gender, ethnicity and age. I consider how participatory visual methods can be used to see as well as listen to students' experiences and subsequently outline how thinking on power, agency and voice, in feminist, postcolonial and post-structural work, might invite uptake of visual methodologies. By reflecting on the data production in this project, alongside the claim that participant-produced images are more 'authentic' or empowering than other methods, I highlight some issues that arose in this project around power relations and participant voice. Rather than seeing

visual methods as a *solution* to the concerns of adult- or white-centred research, this paper sees visual methods as useful where power, embodied identity or visual media form part of the subject of research, and another tool in the box that can engage young people in the research process.

### **The Importance of the Visual in Ethnography**

Drawing on Chris Shilling's (2003) theories of embodiment, Sarah Pink (2009, 8) argues that ethnography, as 'a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced', is concerned with the relationship between bodies and their experiences of their environments. Contemplating Pink's (2009) methods of visual ethnography, becoming a temporary participant in some of the locations where young people engage with visual and physical cultures and learn to give meanings to their bodies and experiences, offers ways of 'imagining' the perceptions, selves, embodiment and emplacement of others. Elsewhere, Pink (2007, 22) recommends ethnography for the way in which researchers can become emplaced in the field, and hence considers ethnography as a process of creating knowledge based on researchers' experiences, but also as 'loyal as possible' to the context. If researchers want to see what participants see, ethnography may

provide opportunities for this. The researcher becomes a part of the social world, an embodied self who participates in the physical spaces of research, has a presence, and thus reflections on the embodied ethnographic process can increase understanding of how research is carried out (Coffey 1999).

Ethnography often incorporates multiple methods to gain richer understandings of a context and participants' worlds. It has been argued that the more methods we have available for producing data on complex and ever-changing human lives, the better the chance of understanding how lives are constructed (Fontana and Frey 2005: 722). Kimberley Oliver et al. (2009, 96) argue that 'although necessary, simply interviewing students several times for short periods of time is insufficient for understanding the complexities and nuances of their worlds'. In this field, some research has centred on surveillance of movements, appearances and interactions, indicating that a visual approach to studying PE classes and young people's embodied experiences is important (Cockburn and Clarke 2002; Fiset 2011; Gard and Meyenn 2000; Wright 1995). Likewise, ethnographic studies with prolonged engagement in a PE context have become common (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Fitzpatrick 2011) for their 'capacity ... to capture a sense of the relationship between individuals, differences be-

tween them, and their perceptions of the discourses and practices that occur in different social fields' (Hills 2006, 544).

Three strands have developed in the use of visual methods: researcher-created or collected images; participant-created, existing images; and participant and researcher collaboration in the creation of images (Banks 2007), and it is the latter with which this project is concerned. Ethnographic work has benefitted from the use of photography, 'as the aim is often to explain and depict forms of life, and the inclusion of photographs aids the creation of "thick description"' (Gibson and Brown 2009, 81). Images have long been used in interviews through photo elicitation, which 'enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research' (Harper 2002: 13), because asking a participant to process visual as well as verbal information can produce different data (Schwartz 1989). 'Auto-driven' photo elicitation, where participants' own photographs or images are the objects (Clark 1999), can offer a 'rich perspective about the complexity of ... children's lives', particularly outside of school, where the researcher cannot have access (Clark-Ibáñez 2007, 168-9). Within the PE and youth sport field, photo-elicitation increasingly from photographs created in collaboration between researchers and participants (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Krane et al. 2010) has offered alternative

ways of engaging young people in sharing non-verbal embodied experiences.

Both visual and ethnographic methods had their appeal for my project. However, as I will also argue, the ways these methods can be carried out are not without problems. Ethnography is at times recognised as an imperfect methodology particularly where power is concerned. Before considering how multiple methods, specifically visual, can be used as part of ethnographic projects with young people, I outline issues of power in researching across 'differences' of gender, race and age that provide some arguments for a visual approach.

### **Power Relations in Research Crossing Gender, Ethnicity and Age**

There was an imperative in this project for an epistemology that recognises the multiple and contradictory ways in which participants' voices may be heard and interpreted in co-creating data and knowledge through participation. My situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) as a white, feminist, adult researcher prompted a reflection on what power I would have in relationships with young participants in their secondary school, and what alternatives might be possible. It could be said that all research is framed by power relations. Recognition of fluid experiences, identities and differences has led feminist research (amongst

others) to destabilise the objective, distant researcher, situate the researcher as well as the participants subjectively in socio-historical context, and problematise perspectives, experiences and explanations. The effect on social research is to create 'pressure to transform questions about what exists into multiple deconstructions of how people think about what exists' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002: 123). Knowledge can then be seen as a specific social production. With the concept of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), that is, knowledge as partial and as historically and spatially located, researchers can understand that they do not see everything, but see some things from one or several places. The researcher's ways of knowing influence the making of meaning from the participants' words and images, in particular across constructed age, gender and ethnic 'difference'; issues of 'who and what is heard, what is listened to and how it is listened to' (Haw 2008, 202) must complicate and problematise knowledge resulting from research. Multiple 'truths' 'within different ways of knowing ... provide varied ways of making sense of the world' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, 55). Researchers need to look at how we produce knowledge about difference and how this knowledge is caught up in power relations (Gunaratnam 2003). Social research with minority ethnic people, although it may help to address mar-



ginalisation, risks problematising difference and normalising whiteness or race neutrality (Maynard 1994). As long as explorations of gendered embodiment remain embedded in whiteness, the ways in which ethnic minority students make sense of adolescence, bodies and physical activity will remain invisible. Given the circumstances and locations within which this research is carried out, to ignore this point would be to reproduce white privilege and normativity.

Age, race and gender are often, though not always, tangible visible identity markers contributing to multiple identifications possible in research relations (Raby 2007). Although socially created, identifications have material effects. It has been argued that white women researchers are unable to fully generate meaning in data with minority ethnic participants, because they cannot share their cultural understandings (Archer 2002). 'Ethnic matching' of interviewers to participants has been called for, to enable greater understanding and rapport in interviews (Papadoupoulos and Lee 2002; Bhopal 2010). Relationships between researcher and participants are created through talk; therefore, race and gender commonalities will not necessarily produce shared positions, because they are produced in interaction (Phoenix 1994).

Ageism has been less examined than sexism and racism, although a growing range of methodological texts on adult-child research rela-

tionships enables us to critique assumptions about young people's interests, experiences and voices. As feminist and postcolonial research debates the impact of cross-gender and -racial interviewing, so research with children and young people recognises the ethics and power dynamics of generation in social research. Power relations between researcher and researched may be particularly compounded by broader societal notions of power between adults and younger people. The ethnography of youth has worked from the ontological position that young people are the insiders of distinctive cultures while the researcher is the outsider (Corsaro and Molinari 2000) and in possession of a low power/knowledge status (Gallagher 2009). Yet, Pam Alldred (1998) argues that some research on children's cultures exoticises those cultures compared to adult norms, constructing children and young people as Other. To paraphrase, adults hear young people based on what we understand as the social construction of youth. Research with children and young people has not always added their voices, understandings and circumstances (Oakley 1994). As Sheila Greene and Malcolm Hill (2005, 18) point out:

for too long we have assumed that children have nothing of interest or importance to tell us about their lives and that we adults under-

stand much better than they what is good for them and how events impact on them.

Young people have been considered to be social actors in interdependence with adults and capable of constructing and negotiating themselves and social worlds (Corsaro 1997). Eimear Enright and Mary O'Sullivan (2011) have identified that it is important for participants to be able to construct themselves as producing legitimate accounts. Additionally, different researcher roles with young people have been suggested, including 'non-authoritarian adult', 'unusual adult', friend, or 'least-adult' as well as detached observer (Damon 1977; Mandell 1991, Christensen 2004). Yet, Kay Tisdall et al. (2009) remind us that 'adult' and 'child' are not straightforward roles or static identities, but are performed in interaction. For instance, when entering a school as an adult and not as a teacher, my position as researcher had to allow me to create relationships with both teachers and students.

The dilemma in researching 'others' may be reconsidered through complicating the meaning and use of 'difference.' Relations between the researcher and the participants should not be seen in terms of 'essential, unchanging differences' (Gunaratnam 2003, 89) that homogenise communities and group experiences. Yet, social categories may remain significant, because

they have a real effect on people and their interactions. Avtar Brah (1996) suggests the possibility of spaces opening up where experiences can lead to connectivity, if not commonality. Instead of searching for a shared identity, or relying on stereotypical similarities or differences when we carry out research, hybridity is called for, which might be thought of as 'a family of resemblances with a continuum of similarities' (Tuana 1993, 283). Neither difference nor hybridity can, however, be assumed (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). To offer an unsatisfying answer, 'in practice we often do not know what it is that makes a difference' (Brownlie 2009, 708). In terms of ethnography, Beverley Skeggs (2001) advocates reflexivity whereby feminist researchers are vigilant of the power they exercise in their choices of topic and participants, gaining access and making interpretations and representations:

When we enter ethnography we enter it with all our economic and cultural baggage, our discursive access and the traces of positioning and history that we embody. We cannot easily disinvest of these (Skeggs 2001, 434).

My research aimed to position adolescent participants as a diverse group of social agents, as people able to construct and reflect on their lives and worlds. To *attempt* to counter power issues and bring partici-

pants further into the process: this was important for it to be a participatory, two-way process of data generation in interaction between the researcher and the participants. It was important to develop research *with*, not *on*, young people, producing relationships in which young people wanted to participate and in which they had some control (Valentine 1999). Epistemologically, we may co-produce knowledge of participants' lives through the prolonged interaction of ethnography, but the conclusions drawn are contingent to that group as well as to the researcher, as proposed by Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of 'situated knowledges'. This is one reason why an ethnographic methodology is useful, but it may also suggest alternative ways of producing data, such as participatory visual methods. As noted above, young people's perspectives on images and visual cultures have been considered necessary to deprivilege adult understandings of the body, provide insights into corporeal meanings, and make visible the norms and values of the hidden curriculum (Prosser 2007).

Into this epistemological consideration of power and difference, a participatory, visual and ethnographic project had appeal for the apparent shift in authority, participant investment and relevance to research on the body. Research processes have then been recognised as needing to create non-exploitative relationships

among researcher and participants, with participatory methods coming to be seen as useful for positioning participants assertively in the research, to enable participants to 'define their own reality and challenge imposed knowledge' (Veale 2005, 254). Pia Christensen and Allison James (2000, 165) argue that one of the most valuable aspects of using visual tools in research with young people and children is 'that they work to mediate the communication between the researcher and the children'. The following section addresses some of these seemingly emancipatory claims in the context of my own project. Participatory visual and ethnographic methods were chosen to capitalise on this identified link between bodies and visual culture, to enable prolonged interaction and to retain consideration of power and 'difference'. There are certainly convincing motivations for taking up visual methods in work with young people, that might address some of the concerns about an objective, distanced and different researcher taking the data they wish *from* participants. The next section answers what, in a practical sense, these methodological choices meant for my research relationships and data production.

### **Using Participatory Visual Ethnography**

When investigating youth cultures and the discourses that inform or are produced by them, the use

of photography can provide a much greater source for documentation than written and spoken words alone. Images can provide insights into meanings that young people create about bodies and their worth, especially photographs created or collated by the participants themselves. By listening to participants' own interpretations, authority is shifted, as Douglas Harper (2002) argues, from the researcher to the subject. Giving more control over the data to the participant-researchers, by asking them to photograph their worlds and the bodies that they consider to be high status or admired, I intended to encourage their active involvement in the research.

This project was concerned with young people's meanings of high status in PE and school: a process that is closely tied to young people's embodied learning through engagement with visual media. The research took place over three school terms, with the participatory photography taking one month to complete. Analysis was of both the photos' content and of elicited explanations in interview transcripts. Some of the decisions behind this research design aimed to address the power issues presented in this paper, by inviting participants to share with me and with each other their visual and verbal stories of PE experiences and constructions of high status bodies. Digital cameras were loaned to the participants, enabling them to have control over flash, colour, zoom, fo-

cus, size or quality, and to delete images, vetting the content and thus sharing with me images with which they felt comfortable. Each photo set was a task produced as a result of a set of instructions given by the researcher and followed to a greater or lesser extent by the participants. I received photos of empty spaces, classmates engaged in PE, posters on bedroom walls, self-portraits and friends posing, and some photos of downloaded internet images. On average, participants produced 23 photos. Sense had to be made of these visual stories and how the participant-photographers used them to answer the instructions they were given. Given my prolonged engagement in the school, I had come to know certain aspects of my participants' lives through our interviews and observing their PE classes. This aided me in interpreting their photos and recreating their stories into appropriate research output. My time in the field also lent itself to a consideration of relationships and data production, as I reflected on whether I had succeeded with the visual ethnography in crossing those lines of difference to create a collaborative work on embodiment. In the remainder of this paper, I will illuminate some of my reflections on conducting the project and producing data with young participants.

#### **Choosing What to Photograph.**

The participants used their voices in different ways; some created more

than 50 photos and spent significant parts of their interviews explaining each one, while others created fewer than five, and preferred to talk abstractedly rather than about the specific images. With the opportunity to see and discuss each other's photos, peer interactions led to some encouragement and some auditing of others' photo choices, potentially discouraging some from speaking. Photo elicitation techniques enabled probing for explanations, asking participants to tell the story behind this photo or that; in any interview, this will mean the interviewer is making decisions and retaining some power. Stories were shared of their sport engagements outside of school, which I could not access, and the diversity of, for instance, the local boxing club could be seen, in contrast to the whiteness of a favourite elite football team. By viewing the bodies that had high status in the participants' eyes, things that might be left unasked or unanswered in an interview could be shown instead. Photographs of their favourite sports stars, pop stars or admired family members brought their lives and cultural engagements into the interview space in school.

Spaces are often dominated by adult discourses around acceptable behaviour, where children or young people negotiate disciplinary surveillance, for instance, by teachers. For some people being filmed or photographed can be associated with danger, control and surveillance

(Banks 2007). The issue of increasing surveillance through a photography project about bodies, which ultimately aims to critique dominant ways of seeing and valuing, should not be lost. With this in mind, it was less surprising to me to count that a quarter of the participants' photos were of empty spaces, objects or pets. Not being seen in photos may be a reclaiming of power (Fisette 2011; Sánchez de Serdio Martín and Vidiella 2011). One highly active participant, Richard, who played county-level hockey, was keen to construct himself as both active and ambitious about his hockey training, repeatedly saying that he practiced '24/7' in order to reach the standard he desired. None of his photos showed him playing or practicing; only a photo of his two 'best' hockey sticks (Figure 1) and a photo of his hockey shirt (Figure 2) indicate his status in hockey, while he is absent. Without the interviews, Richard's photos would not demonstrate the amount of effort that he put into his hockey training nor his levels of fitness and competence.

For a project interested in understanding participants' interpretations of bodies with status, photographs that did not contain any bodies were admittedly frustrating. With photo elicitation however, participants were able to develop the mental images that the photos prompted. Additionally, in the interviews participants described scenes which they were unable to photograph, such as

their swimming lessons, because of the inconvenience or lack of consent. As Lucy explained, she did not take photos of her Army Cadets meetings because 'I was too busy. Cos I'm Lance Corporal, it's quite hard. [Also] just cos not many people want their pictures taken, so I just didn't.' Although creative methods may 'prove more engaging and enjoyable' (Buckingham 2009, 646), the single medium on offer (photography) may not have appealed to all participants, who may have wished not to express themselves through photographs, but through talk, drawing, film, or story-writing, for example. The level of status that can be afforded to photos as 'windows into participants' lives' (Croghan et al. 2008, 348) depends on the extent to which the participants can be said to have engaged with the task.

**Creating Meanings.** William Gibson and Andrew Brown (2009, 82-3) have claimed that by using both researcher- and participant-produced and -collated images, 'the notion of a researcher's privileged position is firmly deconstructed ... as research knowledge comes to be seen as a negotiated creation rather than a researcher's discovery'. At times, participants created photos of the same visual objects around the school that I had added to my own photographic records. This enabled a collaborative process of photo elicitation (Harper 2002), as participants and I worked together to cre-



Figure 1: Richard's photo of his hockey sticks



Figure 2: Richard's Number 9 hockey shirt

ate a shared meaning for the posters on the walls and their impact on bodily knowledge. Discussing her photos of two posters, of netballers and a gymnast, side by side on a wall near the girls' changing room, Ayesha explained that:

people have different abilities and you also have different inspirations or passions towards sports so ... I think the school tries to show everyone, um, is different but at the same time everyone is equal ... When I walk past that poster [of the gymnast], I'm like, 'oh I wish I could do that'. Because it looks quite cool.

The girls selected these posters to photograph, offering a nuanced interpretation of different feminini-

ties performed by netballers and gymnasts. This provided me with more information on how to interpret the photos and the posters themselves, where the meanings were coming from the participants.

Ethnography was useful for observing students' actions in PE, as well as hearing them speak about it: to learn more about their friendships, interactions, and everyday speech while in PE, all relating to their decisions about how or whether to participate. Photographs of fellow students could be reclassified as photographs of friends or teammates. Coupled with the photography, the ethnographic project was able to generate data from beyond school as well as within it, to move towards a richer picture of how cultures outside of school affected students within school. Photography alone would not have achieved this; those photos that tell a story or represent a hypothetical event, rather than record a real occurrence, are a key example of why photo elicitation is necessary. Figure 3 offers a striking example of a visual narrative whose meaning was obscured until I interviewed the participant-photographer, Mitesh. He explained that this photo was a representation of what discouraged him from being active:

[It's] someone laughing at me. When I can't do sport. When I'm trying hard it will look either funny or I just don't know how to do



Figure 3: Mitesh covers his face with his hands

it ... It's because like if people think that I'm doing it wrong, why should I do it? Whereas if I genuinely can't do it, then I'll quit.

It was not possible for me to know this visual narrative without interviewing to learn more about Mitesh's meanings and his reasons for creating this photo. Like other forms of data, visual methods should not be automatically celebrated; images need to be analysed rigorously, not left to speak for themselves.

Some participants interpreted the project as a way to have a say in improvements in PE lessons:

Ayesha: You're ... actually taking [our opinions] forward. No one's ever listened to our opinions, maybe the teachers have, but you're probably going to take it to other teachers and probably change the way they do PE for other students now and make them happier at least.

Ayesha's comment raises something potentially uncomfortable for researchers choosing participatory visual methods for the alternative power relations they are perceived to offer. Where researchers' decisions over how to use the data they produce with young participants are motivated by social justice, Ayesha reminds us of the power this awards.

**The Embodied Researcher.** Other ways in which power re-

mained with me as researcher revealed themselves to me when as an adult in the school I was read as a teacher by many students, who would call me 'Miss'. The ways in which this affected conversations in interviews, or their choices over what to photograph, cannot truly be known. This identity as a teacher-like adult was not afforded to me by the teachers, however. In selecting outfits to wear on the days I would visit the school, I reflected on my own embodied identity and the 'image' I wanted to create. Conscious of the methodological literature on power that I reviewed earlier, I wanted to 'fit in' in some way. I found it difficult to feel confident that I could construct and negotiate a self which would offer me credible professionalism in the eyes of the teachers, and at the same time enable me to be someone with whom the students could feel comfortable discussing PE, activity and bodies. I felt this in the language I used to discuss the aims of the research with the teachers and students and also in the clothing I wore. While I understood that I was rarely read as teacher by the school staff and students, I desired to be read as adult and not as university student (an issue of both age and professional status), and took clothing inspiration from the non-PE staff. Some of the students' photographs (such as Figure 4, where I can be seen stood against the far wall) captured something of the peripheral, sometimes awkward, position I



took in the PE classroom. Indeed, it was I who was different or minority in this field, trying to negotiate the worlds of students and teachers. It was valuable to remember this as I listened and saw participants' own interpretations of bodies and physical activity.



Figure 4: Researcher's peripheral participation in a PE class

**Pedagogical Sites.** It certainly appears difficult for researchers using creative methods to claim to be uniquely empowering or 'giving voice' (Luttrell 2010; Yates 2010). All methods create a position from which it is possible to speak. Nevertheless, if the method should follow the object (Buckingham 2009), research on bodies greatly benefits from the use of visual methods, with appropriate use and analysis. For instance, some of the participants were able to use their

photographs of the high status, slender feminine body to critique media techniques that enhance perfection. Photographs acted as sites for them to add nuance to ideas of the good/bad or slim/fat body in relation to average girls' body possibilities:

Yasmin: Half the time the women that they show on TV, they don't actually look like that anyway.

Amandip: Yeah. Yeah do you know, who is it, Olay, that cream, it made you look clear but they showed that they edited it and all that.

Yasmin: They airbrushed it. Photoshopped them.

Amandip: Yeah.

Interviewer: Hm, what do you think about that then?

Amandip: I think you should just show your natural beauty, you don't need make up or whatever to look different.

Yasmin: And it makes people look fake as well. Like they're not normal, not natural.

As an aspect of critical inquiry, students' photos created opportunities to discuss inclusion and exclusion, normalisation and marginalisation around a subject that has both gendered and racialised implications for these girls. As it has been said elsewhere (Oliver 2001), young people are able to critique the messages they receive, and the interviews offered them a pedagogical site in which to do that.

## Conclusion

This paper has offered some methodological considerations from a project concerned with the meaning-making associated with young people's embodied experiences and has attempted to address a use for participatory visual ethnography that takes into account intersecting sources of power relations. From thoughts about recognising privilege and authority in researcher-researched relationships across gender, ethnicity and age, emerged the project's concern with involving students in co-creation, while gaining contextual knowledge through ethnographic methods. Seeing through photography was a powerful reminder of the body when researching physical activity and even 'minority' ethnic participants, avoiding disembodied interpretations of the experiences of young people in school and beyond.

As an emerging field, participatory visual methods can leave researchers to work out new ways of conducting data production. I used a number of methods in developing this project, as opportunities and limitations arose. While the literature on photo elicitation is well-developed, and ways of dealing with pre-existing photos draw from fields such as semiotics and discourse analysis (Rose 2012), ways of looking at and analysing participant-produced photos are not so common and develop through doing (Luttrell 2010). Thus, this paper leaves open

a number of questions. Are photos just fodder for photo elicitation in interviews? Or can new, participant-produced photos be treated as standalone artefacts which deserve interpretation and analysis techniques of their own? *How* can we interpret participant-produced photos in these ways?

If not a truly participatory project, for the participants did not contribute to designing the purpose and methods of the study, this project was collaborative in the sense of the participants bringing their own interpretations to the photography instruction sheet, being able to take cameras away and show their experiences in pictures as well as words. Reflecting on the use of long-term participatory visual methods with young people, Enright and O'Sullivan (2011) note the epistemological benefits of students' engagement in tasks that deviate from the privileging of written text in schools, and suggest students may believe that they can be more truthful through photography – or at least, not embellish their accounts to say what researchers want to hear. Participatory photography in ethnographic inquiry can constitute a less intrusive way of accessing something of the experiences that the researcher cannot see. Others have argued that the involvement of young people in the research process can be transformative, empowering or therapeutic for participants (Gauntlett and Holzwarth

2006) and photographs have been considered to 'inspire expression not normally encouraged in children' (Cappelo 2005, 171). Despite the apparent imperative to use visual methods in social research, David Buckingham (2009) offers warnings, in response to David Gauntlett and Peter Holzwarth's (2006) claims for the authenticity of visual participatory data, against seeing creative visual methods as particularly enabling stories or feelings that can really be accessed. Not all participants were able or willing to engage in creating photography that could consistently express their feelings. As Pink (2006) has pointed out, visual material cannot be used to record objective truth, but it can assist in creating new knowledge. As the aim in constructivist or post-structuralist research is not to reach 'inner attitudes', creative methods will not do better in reaching places that the interview alone cannot reach.

Photography or related tasks such as scrapbooking and poster-making can provide ways to begin conversations about young people's consumption of images, the meanings they give to different bodies, and how role models are formed and perceived (Krane et al. 2011; Oliver 2001). As research or curricular tasks within critical PE or media literacy, the production and discussion of photographs of the physical cultures of school, community and beyond can enable students and teachers to see others' ways

of seeing and being. This said, as this paper has endeavoured to demonstrate, we must be careful not to romanticise visual methods. Researchers cannot rely on being able to interpret photos as the participants desired, or allowing photos to speak for themselves (Phoenix 2010). However, a postmodern epistemology might consider that both the producer and the viewer of a photograph construct their own meanings of images based on their positions and interests (Pink 2007), suggesting that a researcher's ways of seeing are also valid. Visual methods potentially enable researchers to think differently about a topic – not more deeply or more truthfully, but differently (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Phoenix 2010). How we can produce and discuss participatory visual data, and what we can do with it, appears to remain complex. Through negotiating, on the one hand, worries over the problems of white-washing the experiences of minority ethnic participants, and on the other, celebration of the supposedly empowering and authentic possibilities of visual methods, I have here outlined a number of the practical issues that arose during a visual ethnographic project. This should add detail to conversations around how and why visual methodologies can have a place in social research. I concur with Buckingham (2009) that visual or creative methods do not achieve *more authentic* insights than other methods such

as interviewing alone. Participatory and visual methods may challenge traditional power relations, but they are not a panacea; instead, they provide an addition to methods toolboxes that can involve young people as experts in their own lives. With their choices in selecting and co-constructing data, participants were able to show some of the multiple and intersecting meanings for their embodied identities as students and sports players. Concluding on this project, it is my understanding that visual methods can offer a way to encourage participant investment in research, by creating data that offer insight into the particularly visual aspects of their lives.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The participants who self-identified as British Indian were born in the United Kingdom and typically of Punjabi or Gujarati heritage.

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# 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

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*This paper presents a review of the use of auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews in research with young d/Deaf people as a tool for equalising power imbalances caused by linguistic difference. A brief review of the ways in which other qualitative research methods have been adapted to attempt to make them more accessible to d/Deaf participants is offered. The method of auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews is then outlined with specific focus on its relevance to research with d/Deaf people, before presenting a background to the research project for which this method was used. This project examined the experiences of transition to adulthood and transition planning of eight young d/Deaf people from the South West of England. Finally, the advantages and disadvantages of auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews are discussed.*

*Keywords: Auto-driven Photo-elicitation Interviews, d/Deaf, Mainstream Education, Bourdieu, Transition*

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## Introduction

There has been much interest in the use of visual methods in recent years in the field of social research, but this has not, so far, been reflected in the field of Deaf studies or in research with d/Deaf people in other fields of social research. This article describes the advantages and disadvantages of taking a visual ap-

proach to qualitative research with d/Deaf young people. The importance of using visual methods in qualitative research with d/Deaf people will be discussed, with a review of the more commonly used adaptations made to more traditional qualitative research interviews to make them 'more accessible' to d/Deaf people. Visual research methods are



suggested as a means of introducing an important shift in perception of how best to engage with d/Deaf people in qualitative research. An evaluation of using auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews follows, with a review of the method being presented with reference to a recently completed PhD study by the author (O'Brien 2013), in which auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews were utilised with d/Deaf young people who were educated in mainstream schools to explore their experiences of the transition to adulthood.

Transition to adulthood is a complex, extended process, comprising of both biologically and socially mediated changes in status that young people go through to become recognised as 'adult' in their own society. It is also a process that is little researched or understood from the perspectives of d/Deaf young people, for whom such socially mediated changes can bring additional challenges compared to their hearing peers due to communication difficulties and access to information. It is to meet the challenge of these communication difficulties that visual methods were utilised for this research. This is discussed in more detail below.

It is the convention in the field of Deaf studies to differentiate between members of the Deaf community and deaf people who are not members of the Deaf community by use of capitalised and lower case 'D' and 'd' in the word d/Deaf. The capi-

talised version, 'Deaf', has come to refer to those who consider themselves to be part of the Deaf community, who are proud of their Deaf identity, and whose first or preferred language is sign language. The lower case 'deaf', on the other hand, refers to those who see their deafness as a hearing loss rather than a positive identity and prefer to live in the hearing world using a spoken language (Woodward 1972). However, this binary has become increasingly problematised in recent years due to its essentialism (Brueggemann 2009) and its potential for causing divisions within the community (Heuer 2007). Of the young d/Deaf people involved in the research discussed below, some were members of the Deaf community and others were not. Some felt they were in between the Deaf and hearing worlds, involved in both, but comfortable in neither. It was therefore decided to use the term d/Deaf to refer to these young people, to take into account this 'in between-ness' that many of them reported. However, when one or other meaning of the word 'deaf' is clearly indicated, the deaf/Deaf distinction is used.

### **The Problems of Traditional Qualitative Research Methods with d/Deaf Participants**

Traditional qualitative methods used in the social sciences include observation, interviews of varying levels of structure and questionnaires, among others. All of these

have been utilised with d/Deaf people with varying adaptations to accommodate their communication needs.

These communication needs are not just limited to access to spoken interaction, which could be provided by British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters, note-takers or lip-speakers, depending on the d/Deaf person's own individual preferences, but also access to written English in the case of questionnaires. This can lead to problems in trying to make traditional research methods accessible to d/Deaf people. Some of the adaptations used in previous research are explored below.

Use of written English to replace spoken English is often perceived as an acceptable adaptation when interviewing d/Deaf people as it provides a veneer of accessibility by replacing the spoken mode of English with the written form (see, for example, Dee 2006). However, many d/Deaf people suffer from low levels of literacy along with the challenges of listening to or lip-reading speech. Educational outcomes of d/Deaf young people consistently show that they leave school with much lower scores in English comprehension than their hearing peers (Harris and Terlektsi 2010; Kyle and Harris 2010; Wauters et al. 2006, Powers 2003). This could alienate both oral deaf people and signing Deaf people from the research, acting as a barrier to both populations of d/Deaf people.

Use of BSL/English interpreters is also often considered to be an acceptable adaptation to make traditional research methods more accessible to d/Deaf people (see, for example, Valentine and Skelton 2007). However, this has its own drawbacks. Firstly, it is only appropriate for signing Deaf people, who are relatively fluent and articulate in BSL. It will do nothing to increase accessibility to those d/Deaf people who prefer not to sign. Secondly, this approach relies on the interpreter's own ability in translating from English to BSL, and back again. While there is a national body for the registration of professional BSL interpreters in the UK, the standards and experience of individual interpreters varies. An interpreter who may be experienced and competent in a particular field of work, such as classroom interpreting, may be less adept at working within the sensitive and potentially emotionally charged environment of the qualitative research interview. With each interpretation, there is danger of information loss, of misunderstanding and of corruption of data. Not only that, the presence of another person in the interview unavoidably alters the dynamics of the situation; the participant may feel threatened or pressurised by the presence of two authoritative interlocutors asking them questions, leading to an interview in which the participants' responses are forced out of them rather than willingly volunteered.

A further problem associated with these two adaptations is the dominance of English, in its various forms, over other means of expression, such as sign language (Temple and Young 2004; Temple and Edwards 2002). Even in an interpreted interview, English is still the language of power in the interaction; it is the language in which the questions are written, the questions are asked, and the responses are translated into. This adds another dimension of power imbalance to the interview interaction, a dimension which is particularly oppressive to Deaf people who prefer to use BSL rather than English, and risks alienating them from the research.

d/Deaf researchers or d/Deaf research assistants often interview d/Deaf participants themselves in an attempt to equalise power relations within the research situation (see, for example, Emery 2011; Ladd 2003). However, this in itself is not unproblematic. Language competencies and abilities must be carefully matched to ensure that, for example, a monolingual Deaf BSL user is not attempting to interview a monolingual oral deaf person, or vice versa. Not only could such a situation lead to mutual incomprehension, but also complete alienation from the research project as participants could struggle to see the relevance of such an interview to their own experiences.

Finally, all of the above research tools rely on one common element,

that of linguistic competence. As mentioned above, due to inaccessible schooling, many d/Deaf people's comprehension of written and spoken English lags behind that of their hearing peers. Additionally, young d/Deaf people are unlikely to learn a sign language in childhood unless they are from a Deaf family. This can lead to communication problems within a research interview including misunderstanding of research questions or inability of participants and interviewers to express themselves fully and fluently in a common language, and therefore frustration and disaffection with the research process in general. This could also lead to a biased, or even a self-selecting, research group, in which the only participants able or willing to take part are those who have a high linguistic competence in the researcher's own preferred language, leading to a neglect or marginalisation of different groups of d/Deaf people.

Alternative approaches are needed that avoid these problems and ensure that research with d/Deaf people is accessible, equitable and empowering for participants. One such approach is through utilising visual research methods.

### **Visual Research with d/Deaf People**

It is often claimed by Deaf people themselves that they are very visual in nature. These claims are present in the traditional jokes and stories told in the Deaf community

(Bahan 2004), and in the way in which Deaf people use their signed languages and see the world (Lane 1992, 124). There is also empirical research that shows that Deaf people's brains process visual data in a qualitatively different way to hearing people (Campbell, MacSweeney and Waters 2008; Finney et al. 2003; Finney, Fine and Dobkins 2001), that people who were born deaf have better peripheral vision than hearing people (Bavelier et al. 2000; Neville and Lawson 1987), and that people who use sign language have better visual memories than people who do not (Emmory, Kosslyn and Bellugi 1993).

Use of visual research methods can utilise this visual nature of d/Deaf people, but also avoid the problems associated with traditional research methods that have been discussed above. Visual methods can avoid the problem of linguistic competence, because the images, the photographs or the videos produced in the research process become the focus of analysis (Collier and Collier 1986), or can be used to provide communication support and references within research interactions such as interviews that bypass the need to understand linguistically complex spoken or signed questions or prompts (Clark-Ibáñez 2004). Indeed, images or artefacts produced in the process of research can sometimes do away with the need for linguistic interaction altogether, as in photo-diaries (Latham

2004) or photo-novellas (Wang and Burris 1994), in which the photographs themselves are the objects of analysis, often with no further input from research participants.

However, there have been a few attempts to utilise or explore this visual nature in research. One exception to this was Ernst Thoutenhoofd's 1996 study of the 'ocularcentrism' of the Deaf community. In this research, Deaf and hearing people were given disposable cameras to take photographs of events in their lives, and these were compared to look for qualitative differences in how Deaf and hearing people used images to capture their sense of reality. Thoutenhoofd also spent time in a Deaf club taking photographs as photo stories to capture the visual nature of the Deaf experience in the Deaf club.

Apart from this study, and some minor use of visual methods as small parts of other research projects (see, for example, Sheridan 2008), visual research methods remain a relatively untapped resource in research with d/Deaf people. This paper will explore the use of a particular visual research method, auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews, with d/Deaf young people to examine their experiences of the transition to adulthood.

### **Auto-driven Photo-elicitation Interviews**

Photo-elicitation, is, simply put, 'inserting a photograph into a re-

search interview' (Harper 2002, 13). These photographs could be stock photographs, photographs taken by the researcher, or photographs taken by the research participants. They are used in the research interview to elicit a response from the participant in a similar way to a spoken or signed question. In effect, they are used as visual questions and prompts within the interview. Examples of when stock or researcher-taken photographs are used could be when a researcher has a very specific research focus in mind, when participants are considered to be too young or otherwise unable to take photographs themselves (Epstein et al. 2006), or when large numbers of people are to be shown the same images, for example, to get a community response to an event of some kind (Byrne and Doyle 2004).

However, many see photo-elicitation interviews as an empowering method for the participants and instead prefer to ask participants to take their own photographs for the interview, focusing on what they think is important (Holm 2008; Clark 1999). This is often termed 'auto-driven photo-elicitation', in which the participant controls the subject of the photographs, and also controls the interview in which the photographs are discussed. This is considered to give the participant the power to control the interview, but also to draw the researcher's attention to elements of their lives

that the researcher may have considered to be inconsequential (Clark-Ibáñez 2007). Indeed, a risk of photo-elicitation interviews is that the researcher may decide to utilise 'visually arresting images' that, while making an impact on the researcher, actually mean little or nothing to the participant themselves. Instead, by allowing the research participant to control which photographs are taken and discussed, an auto-driven interview can 'break the researcher's frames' and allow them to see the world through the eyes of the participants, rather than imposing their own frames of reference on the participant's experiences and thus unfairly influencing the interpretation and analysis of interview data (Samuels 2007).

Not only does this method give the participant the freedom and the power to influence the interview in a way that most effectively reflects their own experiences and beliefs, but it can also avoid the problems of linguistic competency described above. By allowing the participants to take the photographs of what they believe is important, this method can allow d/Deaf people to visually express themselves about their beliefs and values without having to resort to languages in which they may not be fluent. Using a photograph as a starting point for such discussions and interviews means that the groundwork of explaining such deep-held beliefs can be done by reference to the images, rather

than relying on linguistic description. Using the photographs as visual reference points can also ease communication within the interview itself, making communication between interviewer and participant easier, with less scope for misunderstandings. The use of photographs in the interview removes the pressure from the participant by making the photograph the subject of the interview (Collier and Collier 1986). This distancing effect can make the participant more forthcoming and open about their experiences and their discussion of the images they captured.

However, there are also some disadvantages associated with this method. A major disadvantage is that by handing over the control of each interview to the participant involved, the researcher is not guaranteed data that can be compared between interviews. It is very possible that within a research project, no two interviews will cover the same topics, making it difficult to compare data between interviews, or build a unified picture of people's experiences from a collection of disparate auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews. Some researchers have attempted to circumvent this problem by the use of shooting scripts, specifying to a greater or lesser extent what sort of images they wish the participants to capture (Samuels 2004). While this can ensure that data collected from different interviews can be collated and

compared, it runs the risk of imposing the researcher's own frames of reference on the participants, which nullifies one of the great advantages of this method.

A related risk is that in order to meet the ethical requirements of research ethics boards, participants are often given stringent instructions on what they are and are not allowed to photograph. Such ethical requirements often include that subjects of photographs must be of age to give their consent to be photographed, they must agree to be photographed, and topics which are not to be photographed are often specified, such as sexual behaviour, substance abuse or criminal acts. However, such restrictions can be seen by participants as a breach of trust in the researcher-participant relationship, and can sometimes provoke deliberately antagonistic photographs in an attempt to challenge what could be seen as presumptions or stereotypes about participants' behaviour (Allen 2008).

### **Use of Auto-driven Photo-elicitation Interviews with d/Deaf Young People**

In the research discussed here, eight young d/Deaf people from England aged from their late teens to mid-twenties took part in a two-step interview process that involved an initial semi-structured interview and then a follow-up auto-driven photo-elicitation interview once the

young people had taken their photographs.

In all interviews, the choice of language was left entirely up to the young person. This meant that some interviews were conducted in spoken English, some in BSL, some in Sign Supported English (SSE), and others in a mixture of all three. The aim of this was to provide the young people with as close to an 'exceptional situation for communication' (Bourdieu 1999, 614) as was possible and to allow them to express themselves in the language in which they were most comfortable and possessed the most linguistic capital.

The initial semi-structured interview was intended to combat the problem of lack of comparative data without imposing a restrictive shooting script on the young people. This semi-structured interview enabled questions linked to educational experiences, family background, language choice – all subjects that were not guaranteed to arise within an auto-driven photo-elicitation interview – to be asked of all participants.

The semi-structured interview also allowed trust and understanding to be built between the researcher and participant. As mentioned above, careful language matching is essential in interviews with d/Deaf people to ensure that an unproblematic communication environment is created. In this research, all interviews were conducted by

the author, a d/Deaf man fluent in both BSL and spoken English. The semi-structured interview, in which an interview schedule was followed, allowed me to assess and meet the participants' language preferences. The structure provided by the interview schedule allowed us to familiarise ourselves with each other's language use and idiosyncrasies in a relatively secure communicative environment.

Meeting each other for the first time in the arguably more familiar situation of the semi-structured interview, a situation familiar to many young people through job interviews, careers service interviews, college entry interviews and other one-to-one interview situations (Holstein and Gubrium 2004), meant that this first meeting was a good opportunity to build rapport between interviewer and participant and encourage the trust needed for a successful auto-driven photo-elicitation interview. Auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews require a degree of trust to be successful, as taking photographs of personal life events can be very sensitive (Clark-Ibáñez 2004). The opportunity to get to know each other, provided by performing the semi-structured interview, allowed me to build up a level of rapport and trust with the participant, which I hoped would encourage them to take meaningful photographs for the next stage of interviews.

Finally, rather than providing a detailed shooting script, participants

were simply asked to take photographs of places or things that were important to them as they grew up. If they wished to take photographs of people, they were encouraged to take photographs that represented the people they wanted to show. This was to avoid the need to impose complex guidelines and rules about gaining consent of people photographed, making sure the subjects of the photographs were over 16, and so on. It was felt that this approach offered two advantages. Firstly, it was possible that excessively complex rules about who and what they could photograph could make participants reluctant to engage with the research. By stating that they should not photograph any identifiable people, the need for such rules was avoided. Secondly, by encouraging participants to take more abstract, representational photographs, it was hoped that the interview discussion about the photographs would be more in-depth and meaningful. The only other restriction imposed was a request that they did not photograph any illegal or sexual activity.

Once the semi-structured interview was completed, the young people were presented with a disposable camera with which to take photographs, and consent forms and guidelines for taking photographs were explained to them and signed. They were then asked to take the photographs they wanted and return the cameras in a stamped, ad-

dressed envelope that I provided. Arrangements to meet again for the auto-driven photo-elicitation interview were made via email once the photographs had been developed and a copy sent to the participants.

During the auto-driven photo-elicitation interview, participants were asked to go through the photographs at their own pace and explain them in their own words. As an interviewer, I limited my contributions in the interview to an initial 'Tell me about these photographs' at the start of the interview and to prompts or questions linked to their comments on each photograph. I did not introduce any new topics during the interview

All interviews, semi-structured and photo-elicitation, were recorded on a digital video-camera. Those conducted in spoken English were sent to a professional transcriptionist to be transcribed in written English for analysis. I translated and transcribed those conducted in BSL or SSE myself. While I am not a trained translator/interpreter, I hold a level 4 NVQ qualification in BSL and consider myself bilingual in BSL and English.

Before presenting some of the results of this research, it is important to provide some context; in particular, the concepts of mainstream education and the term 'transition' as used in government policy in the UK must be discussed. This discussion is presented in the following sections.



### **Mainstream Education for Young d/Deaf People**

Prior to the Warnock Report of 1978 and its recommendation that 'the majority of children with special educational needs will have to be ... helped within the ordinary school' (Warnock 1978, 95), most d/Deaf young people were educated in special schools or residential schools for d/Deaf children. However, following the Warnock Report and the Education Act of 1981 that followed, more and more d/Deaf young people received their education in mainstream schools. The current situation is that over 95 per cent of d/Deaf young people in the UK attend mainstream schools (Ladd 2003).

While this drive to mainstreaming was in keeping with the inclusional aims and objectives of the social model of disability (Oliver 1996), for many in the Deaf community it was a direct attack on their community and language (Lee 1986). The residential school, along with the Deaf club, had been a traditional foundation of the Deaf community, in which the language, values and traditions of the community had been passed from d/Deaf children of Deaf parents to d/Deaf children of hearing parents (Ladd 2003). Since deafness is of such low incidence (Fortnum et al. 2001; Fortnum et al. 2002), and more than 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents (Lucas and Schatz 2003), this horizontal transmission of community values from child to child

was particularly important. While it would usually be expected that vertical transmission of cultural values from parent to child would occur, this could not be the case in the Deaf community due to the relative scarcity of deaf children born to Deaf parents. Residential schools therefore held particular value for the Deaf community (Ladd 2003), which was damaged by the move to mainstreaming.

Not only did this drive to mainstreaming have a negative effect on the Deaf community, but d/Deaf children and young people were often isolated in classes in which they were the only d/Deaf person, with teachers with no training or understanding of how to effectively teach young d/Deaf people or include them in their lessons (Hopwood 2003; Gregory and Bishop 1989; Bishop 1979). As a result of this lack of training and knowledge, the educational achievements of young d/Deaf people have been consistently low, lagging some years behind their hearing peers (Harris and Terlektsi 2010; Kyle and Harris 2010; Wauters et al. 2006; Powers 2003). In terms of social inclusion and the social effects of mainstreaming, d/Deaf young people also suffered negative effects. It has been found that not only have d/Deaf people educated in mainstream schools consistently reported loneliness, lack of friends and bullying (Wauters and Knoors 2008; Angelides and Aravi 2006; DEX 2003; Jarvis 2007;

Musselman, Mootilal and Mackay 1996; Ladd 1991), but also that the rate of psychiatric disorder in d/Deaf young people in mainstream education, at 60.9%, is over 'one and a half times that of an equivalent inner city hearing population' (Hindley et al. 1994, 931).

While it has been argued that 'inclusional education' results in better educational outcomes, the concept of 'inclusion' remains little understood and widely debated, with very little consensus on its meaning (Allen 2008; Norwich 2008; Warnock 2005). This is particularly the case for d/Deaf young people, for whom 'inclusion' is far too often taken to mean simple physical presence in a shared classroom, with little consideration given to the teaching practices needed to make a young d/Deaf person truly included in the lesson, or, indeed, socially included in the school community (Marschark et al. 2002; Cigman, 2007; Jarvis 2007).

### **Transition**

The transition to adulthood is not a simple one-off event, but a complex and drawn out process that can occur over many years. Transition to adulthood itself is defined differently in different societies, but is often related to chronological age, particularly socially significant ages at which young people achieve 'criminal responsibility, sexual consent, voting rights ... and the giving of medical consent' (Read et al. 2006, 167).

This transition can often be extended or delayed for young people with disabilities or special educational needs (Clark and Hirst 1989; Hirst 1987). Most research in the field of Deaf studies has focused on Deaf people from Deaf schools, with little attention paid to those with less easily defined identities who attended mainstream schools. What research has been done on the experiences of young d/Deaf people from mainstream schools has been mostly autobiographical, anecdotal or quantitative in nature (see, for example, Oliva 2004; DEX 2003; Ladd 1991). Very little is therefore known about their transitions to adulthood and their personal feelings about this transition.

### **Transitional Experiences of Young d/Deaf People from Mainstream Schools**

For the majority of the young people involved in this research, transition to adulthood and independence was a long, drawn out and chaotic process. In this section I shall briefly recount three of the key themes that arose from the interviews. These are belonging, identity and independence. A lack of space prevents me from analysing more of the themes that arose in these interviews. The original language used in each interview will be noted in the quotes to draw attention to the fact that the English extracts presented here are translations.

## Belonging

A key theme that arose in all the interviews conducted was that of belonging. Many of the young people felt that they did not fully belong in either the hearing or the Deaf community. For many, this was due to their experiences in mainstream schools; they simply did not share the experiences of those in the Deaf community of residential schools for the Deaf or the fluency in BSL that was required for full membership of the Deaf community, and as such felt somewhat excluded. Similarly, they felt excluded from the hearing community, because, despite their oral education, they did not feel able

to socialise with hearing people due to communication problems. This built upon previous findings of loneliness and isolation reported in school (Wauters and Knoors 2008; Angelides and Aravi 2006; DEX 2003; Jarvis 2007; Musselman, Mootilal and Mackay 1996; Ladd 1991). It appeared that for some d/Deaf young people, this isolation persisted once they had left school and had begun work or further or higher education.

Photographs taken by two different young people, Zoe and Jen, illustrated where they found the feeling of belonging that they otherwise did not have.



'That's all the programmes I've collected when I go to concerts' (Zoe, English).



'That's at the football game, because [team name] I'm a really big supporter... But unfortunately that game was a really bad game and we lost' (Jen, English).

These photographs represented social events that were particularly important for these two young women: pop concerts for Zoe and football games for Jen. Both of them had reported that they found it difficult to fit into the mainstream, hearing social world that they had chosen to be part of:

I worry so much about my speech because I don't know if I speak very good, or rather [if] people understand me, you know, it may put them off. Because I know what people can be like when they don't understand me, they just ignore me and walk away. (Zoe, English)

I do find it difficult in the hearing world sometimes. I'm like in the middle, I'm not Deaf enough, but I'm not hearing enough so I'm in the middle. Sometimes, especially because it takes a lot of energy lip reading, it can be quite draining and then people think you're being rude, but you're just so tired you don't want to talk. It's like I have to explain it to them, it can be very frustrating because they can't see your side of things. It's so hard. (Jen, English)

Yet, neither of them felt comfortable in the Deaf community. For Jen, this reluctance to engage with the Deaf community came from her experiences of trying to fit in, but being rejected for being 'not Deaf enough'. Zoe, on the other hand,

was not aware of the existence of the Deaf community before our interview. Both of these young women, therefore, had limited opportunities to feel like they belonged in any social situation. However, in the communal nature of the social events pictured above, they found some sense of community, of togetherness, that did not depend on communication, whether signed or spoken. In these places, they were able to feel like they belonged, that they had a place in society, and they bypassed the struggle with communication that faced them in other social situations:

I just like watching other people sing their heart out! And being part of ... being part of the family in that arena, it's different. (Zoe, English)

Well watching it, it's like exciting because you're all together in the community, you're all watching it. Like, I like going to watch the game, because it's like you're all together and it's really loud, and everyone's like 'Oi!', cheering, and the atmosphere is really good. (Jen, English)

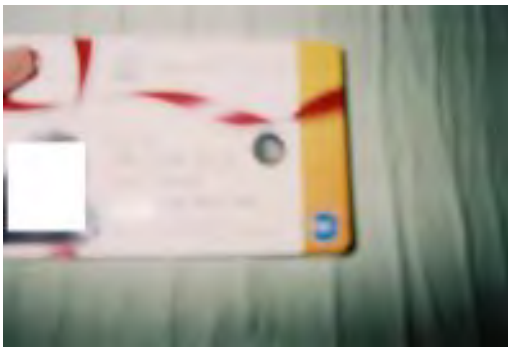
This discussion of 'fitting in' was inspired in these interviews by two very different photographs. While the initial focus of the photographs appeared to be simply social events or activities in which these young people enjoyed participating, deeper discussion revealed that this en-

joyment arose, at least in part, from the nature of these activities. The clear, unified purpose of the crowd at a football match or pop concert, the lack of need for negotiation or communication with their fellow attendees, meant that these young people found a sense of belonging at these events that they could not find elsewhere. Without the opportunity for discussion of these photographs provided by auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews, this deeper reason may have remained hidden.

### Identity

Another key theme that appeared in many of the interviews conducted was that of identity. Many of the young people struggled with defining their identity due to the lack of clear community involvement in either the Deaf or hearing communities that stemmed from their experiences of mainstream education and the so-

cial isolation that resulted. However, there were some photographs that inspired interesting discussion of the nature of their identities. The prevailing model of deafness and disability that these young people met in their everyday lives remained the medical model of disability: that their 'hearing loss' was something to be fixed, to be treated. This model was prevalent in education, employment and medical policy and practice, and so was the model that the young people came across most often. While most of the young people rejected this model as unrepresentative of their experiences of growing up d/Deaf, some were also reluctant to identify themselves with the Deaf community for various reasons. However, the complexity of these feelings about identity was not always easily captured in the photographs taken.



'This is a bus pass, because I always use a bus pass 'cause I always go on the bus to town all the time' (Zoe, English).



'This is the cup of water, it represents the interpreter, because it's something that belongs to them. So that's the interpreter' (Valerie, BSL).

Both of these photographs, from Zoe and Valerie respectively, could suggest that these young women agreed with the medical model of deafness. Both could suggest that they focused more on their 'impairment' rather than the positive aspects of being d/Deaf, by showing the kind of adjustments they required or the benefits they claimed to counteract the negative effects of their deafness. However, Zoe used her disabled bus pass because, as she said:

I always use a bus pass ... because it's very easy and it saves a lot of money! (Zoe, English)

For Zoe the bus pass was simply a pragmatic choice. She used it to save money and rejected the notion that holding a disabled bus pass could reflect on her identity. Indeed, she rejected any suggestion that she was disabled:

I can't see myself as disabled; I just can't hear that's all. I mean, there is nothing really wrong with me, I can still do things. (Zoe, English)

Instead, she felt a degree of confusion over her identity as a d/Deaf person. When asked directly how she would identify herself in those terms, she replied:

I dunno ... Sometimes I get embarrassed ... I dunno (laughs nervously). (Zoe, English)

Valerie had no such confusion about her identity. Initial analysis of the photograph without input from Valerie would reveal little about her reasons for taking this photograph. Once she revealed that the photograph represented the BSL/English interpreters who supported her in university lectures, one could draw the conclusion that she saw herself as disabled, and was drawing attention to the support provision she needed to access her course. However, Valerie revealed that this was not the case. Instead, she said that the photograph of the interpreter was meant to reveal that:

... Deaf people have our own language, and it's got nothing to do with disability. If we have the right communication, the right methods of communication that match d/Deaf people, it's the same as ... it's the same as ... it's like hearing people, they have different languages, like Spanish. If a Spanish person and an English person can't communicate with each other, that doesn't make them disabled. It's the same for Deaf people. BSL is just another language. (Valerie, BSL)

This was an outright rejection of the medical model of disability in favour of a cultural-linguistic model of Deaf identity (Ladd 2003), in which the use of sign language is seen as a much more central marker of identity than degree of hearing loss.

### **Independence**

A final theme that arose in all the interviews conducted was that of independence, an essential step towards making the transition to becoming an adult. Rather than focusing on individual photographs in this section, I shall illustrate this theme using an overview of all the photographs taken by two participants, Rob and Zoe.

Rob was in his late teens at the time of our interview, and he returned the camera having taken 28 photographs. Of these 28 photographs, 24 were taken outside, in different locations around his home town. These included his local gym and swimming pool, his favourite shops, his old college and the youth club he attended, and a photograph of his favourite car. These photographs gave an impression of independence on Rob's part, an impression that he was able to travel to different parts of his local area to take these photographs of the different activities he was involved in. However, on discussion of the photographs, a very different picture emerged. He had relied on his foster-mother to drive him around to these different locations to take the photographs, as he could not himself drive. The discussion also revealed that he normally went to many of the locations shown with his foster-parents, rather than on his own. So, the impression of independence given by the photographs in his case could be argued to be misleading.

Zoe, also in her late teens, re-

turned her camera having taken 19 photographs, all but one of which were taken in her bedroom. The sole photograph taken outside the confines of her room was taken from her driveway, and showed the window of her bedroom. These photographs showed such things as her favourite books and DVDs, programmes of different concerts she had attended, posters of her favourite football players, and her favourite clothes and shoes. On first viewing, these photographs may have suggested a degree of loneliness or isolation, suggesting that Zoe spent most of her time at home alone. However, it emerged from our talk that while she did find it difficult to find a sense of belonging in her life (discussed above), she was far from lonely or isolated in her social life and had a good friendship group. Many of the photographs she had taken were representational. The photographs of DVDs represented her love of films, and she went to the cinema with her friends every week. The photographs of concert programmes also represented her active social life, and a photograph of her disabled bus pass, rather than a comment on her deafness or identity (see above), showed how she was able to achieve a measure of independence without having to rely on her parents for transport.

### **An Evaluation of the Method**

The auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews that followed the semi-structured interviews were a quali-

fied success. Of the eight young people who took part in semi-structured interviews, only four then took part in the auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews. Of the four who did not take part, one participant's photographs were lost in the post when she tried to return them, and she did not have the time to re-take them. Two other participants had work and university pressures respectively, so were not able to commit the time required of them to complete the photo-elicitation stage of the research. The fourth participant went through a major transition after the completion of the semi-structured interview and had to withdraw from the project. It was unfortunate, and telling of the pressures that these young d/Deaf people were under during their respective transitions, that the commitment needed for this method was too much.

It was particularly unfortunate for a project that aimed to make use of visual research methods to tap into the visual nature of d/Deaf people that so few of the participants were able to complete the photo-elicitation stage of the interview process. This made it difficult to assess the impact that the use of this method had on the project. The initial semi-structured interviews therefore became the source of much of the data used and analysed for the project. However, the photo-elicitation interviews did provide valuable data and contributed to the project in other ways.

One of the main motivations for

using auto-driven photo-elicitation methods in this project was to give the young people the chance to control the interview situation and equalise, as far as possible, the power relations between us. I felt that this worked well, and the freedom and confidence this provided the young people allowed them to bring up topics within the interview that were of obvious importance to them, but that I would not have otherwise thought to ask about. However, these topics were not always of relevance to the main direction of my research into their transitional experiences. This meant that while some of the photo-elicitation interviews resulted in great depth of data, not all of this data was useful or relevant to the research questions posed in the research project. This does not invalidate the method in any way, but suggests that it may be better suited to a more flexible project with more loosely defined research questions or objectives.

The photo-elicitation interviews did not take longer to complete than the semi-structured interviews, as some have reported (for example, Meo 2010), but provided very different data. Some of the discussion resulting from the photographs was expansion on what had been discussed in the semi-structured interviews, but much of it was new and more personal information, because the use of photographs gave the young people a way of expressing themselves that they would not have otherwise had (Rose 2007). Other



researchers have found that use of photographs in interviews made communication easier, by providing a 'clear, tangible prompt' (Clark-Ibáñez 2004, 1512) to keep the interview flowing. This was certainly true, as the use of photographs as visual reference points made the interview much easier communication-wise for both participants and myself.

All four young people who completed the photo-elicitation stage reported that they enjoyed the process of taking photographs and using them to explain the important things in their lives. The use of photographs provoked discussion about the visual nature of d/Deaf people with the participants. The visual nature of d/Deaf people has been discussed in Deaf studies literature, usually in connection with members of the Deaf community whose first, or preferred, language was sign language (Hauser et al. 2010; Bahan 2004; Lane et al. 1996). However, some of the participants who preferred to communicate orally spontaneously commented on the visual nature of the photographs they had taken and the visual nature of their experiences. This suggested that it is not just those d/Deaf people who use sign languages who have this visual side to their nature.

A final advantage of conducting the photo-elicitation interviews was that during this second meeting, the young people were far more relaxed and confident in my company.

I was able to build up enough rapport in the semi-structured interviews that the young people trusted me enough to talk about their lives in more detail. This could also have been because focusing on the photographs in the interview removed the pressure from the young people, which made them more comfortable discussing their feelings and experiences (Collier and Collier 1986, 130). The success of these interviews provided rich, in-depth data about the young people's lives.

### **Conclusion**

The use of auto-driven photo-elicitation methods added greatly to the depth of the data collected in this project. It is felt, particularly with the current developments in the field of Deaf space and Deaf geographies (Gulliver 2009; Kusters 2011) in which traditional research methods such as archive research and anthropological interviewing have been used, that visual research methods such as auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews have a great deal to offer the field. The use of visual methods would allow more in-depth research of the spatial practices and beliefs of Deaf people, as well as visual documentation of space, which would offer exciting and innovative ways of exploring this area.

Visual research methods offer a productive way to work with d/Deaf people in other fields. Not only do they take advantage of the visual nature of d/Deaf people, but also of-

fer a way of easing communication within research interviews. With the increase in mainstreaming and the negative effects that this can have on the linguistic competence of young d/Deaf people in both English and BSL, communication can become a serious issue in research. Use of visual prompts and visual questions such as in photo-elicitation interviews can help to avoid these issues of lack of linguistic competence and ensure that d/Deaf people are not necessarily at a disadvantage in research interviews.

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# The Urban Photography Summer School at Goldsmiths, University of London: A Discussion and Photo Essay on Urban Rhythm

Ruben Demasure

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*This article consists of two parts. The first part is a discussion of the annual international Urban Photography Summer School, organized by Goldsmiths, University of London. This testimony is based on the author's participation in the latest edition of this two-week event. The discussion is interesting to bring this course under attention and can be relevant for future candidates. Two main points of general interest are focused on: (1) the relationship between aesthetics and research value in photography, and (2) the relationship between text and image. The second part of the article is a photo essay with the author's own final visual project that was produced and presented during the summer school. The images explicitly link back to the more epistemological questions in the first part. The essay deploys street photography to observe performativity and human behavior as it is structured by or opposed to the rhythms that create a city. Therefore, it refers to sociologist Henri Lefebvre's approach of rhythm analysis.*

*Keywords: Urban Photography, Street Photography, Visual sociology, Photo Essay, Rhythm*

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## 1. Discussion

Last summer, I participated in the annual international Urban Photography Summer School (iUPSS) organized by Goldsmiths, University of London. This article is divided into two parts. The first part is a discussion of the summer school. There, I want to reflect on the epistemological challenges and concerns of general interest that were raised. Two main points are

focused on. The first one is the relationship between the aesthetic merit and the research value of an image. The other point is the question of how images can speak for themselves or what the necessity is of spoken or written words, especially in a research context. The first part of the article is necessary to sketch out the context in which the photo essay, presented in the second part, was produced. The photo es-



say is my own final visual project as a participant of the summer school. In other words, the article's second part is the output of the first part. The visual essay is a street photography project on the rhythms of the city and the performativity of our behavior in that urban public space. The photo essay also includes a meta-layer that explicitly links back to my personal, more medium-specific questions raised in the first part. By doing so, this article functions as a testimony of my own practical and concrete questions and insights resulting from an intense two weeks of thinking about photography as a visual form of urban inquiry and applying it in that manner.

For the third year in a row, the summer school (3–15 September 2012) offered a platform for the exploration of photography as a visual method. It is a stand-alone course, but connected with Goldsmiths' MA in Photography and Urban Cultures. The event plans to expand the number of participants over the next year. This can be seen as a sign of the gradually rising academic interest in, and concern for the visual in social sciences.

The summer school was divided into three modules: 'Urban Landscape', 'Objects' and 'Street Photography'. During the first week, each of the three was addressed in a number of theoretical contributions. Each topic was related to a practical photography assignment. The second week focused on the

participants' self-directed visual projects, finalized in a group exhibition. The module on street photography was my main motivation to participate. Street photography is the topic of my PhD project at the University of Antwerp under the supervision of visual sociologist Luc Pauwels. As I am a research and teaching assistant, the project is funded by this institution. The current title of the project, which also summarizes it, is: 'Street photography: (Re)conceptualizing the Field and an Exploration of Street Imagery as a Distinct Visual Sociological Source.' By attending the summer school, I wanted to gain the skills and experience to integrate a visual, practice-based part into my PhD with researcher-generated (street) photography. Despite the revival of street photography during the last decade, such an academic initiative on urban and street photography is quite unique (commercial public street photography workshops, however, are booming). Over the years, Goldsmiths' Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), which organizes this summer school, has proved itself as one of the leading voices on urban and street photography, visual sociology and visual urbanism. Besides this summer school and their aforementioned MA, their members also founded the new International Association of Visual Urbanists (iAVU) and organize the annual Urban Encounters event and this year's conference of the

International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA).

The group of 14 participants was composed of diverse nationalities (coming from Scotland, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Romania, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, France and the United States). Half of the people attending were doing a PhD in fields as diverse as design, social geography, (visual) sociology, communication studies and architecture. Others were coming from teaching, film or art backgrounds. Therefore, the input of the participants was interdisciplinary, just as the programme's approach explicitly intended. At the beginning of the course, it was said that there's no such thing as an expert of photography; it's an interdisciplinary thing. This relates to an idea we returned to a number of times during the course: photography critic Bill Jay's (1992, 10) description of the image as slippery. The different meanings of a photograph can often 'slide off' in all directions, provoking 'meanderings into geography, psychology, politics, biography, sociology, popular culture, art history, science, morality and a myriad of other connected fields' (Jay 1992, 10). This brings me to a number of tensions that participants struggled with during the summer school: the boundaries between the artistic, the aesthetic and the (research) (con)text. These will return in the visual essay later on.

### **Photography as Artistic and/or Research Practice**

On the website, the summer school was announced with the statement that: 'the programme will explore how the practice of urban image making informs the development of a reflexive and critical *research* perspective'<sup>1</sup>. Although, 'designed for photographers, artists and ethnographers', with the 'objective to facilitate a link between visual practice and urban theory/research', the programme leaned mostly towards photography as an aesthetic practice.

Off course, we worked within a number of 'constraints': for the one-week project and especially the three single day assignments, we didn't have time to do in-depth background research on parts of a city most of us didn't know that well. Within those timeframes, we had to come up with three good images for each small assignment and six to ten for the final visual project.

The stretch became most clear in an (optional) portfolio workshop by professional photographer Laura Cuch with advice on how to make a living out of our photography. The different intentions also became present in the lectures by photographers Marco Bohr and Mandy Lee Jandrell, which were organized in the Urban Landscape module. If Jandrell's approach comes across as theoretically preconceived and conceptually planned, then Bohr contested of the difficulty to pre-

conceive a project before going to places. The former approach could be described as 'research-led' and the latter as 'flâneur-based'<sup>2</sup>. These two terms derive from our general discussions with Paul Halliday during the summer school. They can be linked to the question of image-making as research method versus aesthetic or artistic practice. While the research-led photographer would have a research plan ready and develops a series of photographs to support or supplement it, the flâneur-based approach lets the questions rise out of the observations, impressions and the material, when exploring certain places in a photographic manner. Of course, these are relative rather than strict categories that can overlap at certain points in the process. The examples make these approaches more clear.

Jandrell uses photography to critically reflect on landscape, urbanism and our cultural perceptions. The four projects she presented were very much based on theoretical grounds (e.g. Urry 1990; Ryan 1997). Always on the borders between fake and real, and following W.J.T. Mitchell (1994, 5), she photographically explores how (urban) 'landscape is not a genre of art but a medium'. This means that a landscape can be read as expressing social or cultural values and power relations, instead of approaching it as an object. The German photographer Marco Bohr also presented

four projects, mostly concerned with the use of space. His different approach became most clear in his series 'No Ball Games' (2003) and 'Right of Way' (2011). It was only after visiting the housing estate Sidehill in Edinburgh almost daily for half a year that the focus of his series became the way children interact with the space. 'Right of Way' arose out of a residence in Canberra, where he was confronted with pedestrians' use of space in this city designed for cars. Furthermore, the talk and work of visual sociologist Caroline Knowles (discussed in point two) can be deemed a researcher-led approach, while Peter Coles and Paul Halliday in their 'object' and 'street photography' session testified to how a project only got assembled or delineated out of single images after years of dwelling on Paris and London streets, respectively.

In the module on street photography, we discussed with Paul Halliday how contemporary (British) street photography is missing a 'research' perspective or critical depth and mainly relies on an aesthetic effect that is most of the time either funny or foreign (meaning unusual, surreal). In his introductory session 'Re-thinking Street Photography', Halliday even hesitated to use the badly defined and misunderstood term and rather speaks of 'street-based' photography as a more open and inclusive category. Indeed, the whole idea that the street photographer can just observe (connected

with the objectivity of social sciences) and not interfere with the street came across as highly problematic in our sessions. In our street assignment, interaction with the people that we photographed was allowed, and awareness of our own role as a photographer was stimulated. The statement was made that street photography today is missing essential and deeply political voices, i.e. street photography that reaches out of the aesthetic play within the boundaries of the frame to critically deal with 'the bigger picture' of the social issues at stake. As an example, we returned to the engaged body of street photography of Markèta Luskacová a number of times during the summer school. Luskacová is a Czech photographer, living and working in London. In a long-term project of over thirty years, she documented the street markets and the people of Brick Lane and Spitalfields. In an essay on Luskacová, touching on several issues also raised in this article, photographer and writer Gerry Badger (2000) describes that, 'the primary tenor of her work is [humanity], the everyday business of how people live and interact with each other, how they face the livelong day and get on with the often painful process of ordering their lives.' Luskacová is particularly engaged with traditions, values, communities and ways of life that are under threat within society. However, until recently she was ignored by the art institutions. She applies her social

sciences background in a photographic manner rather than through *textual* academic analysis.

### **The Relationship Between Images and Text**

A second 'constraint' was that we showed our own series of images to the group in a short oral presentation, i.e. without text. A central question that occupied many participants was: can images (taken with a critical research perspective) talk for themselves? For example, in her book on visual methodologies, geographer Gillian Rose (2006, 249) expresses her 'conviction that images only make sense [and only effectively carry an argument] in a wider context that will always include written text.' Indeed, the test for some participants to not give a verbal explanation and just show their pictures, proved problematic. The summer school's two bookend sessions are exemplary here.

On the one hand, Les Back, professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths and an authority in visual ethnographic research, in a very engaging introductory session, talked about sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu conducted extensive fieldwork in Algeria in the midst of the colonial war. Yet, he decided *not* to include the photographs he took there, originally more than 2500, in his writings on the period. Vice versa, in the last presentation, Caroline Knowles, a visual sociologist and author on visual methods (2004),

but not an image-maker herself, discussed the added value of why she works with a photographer on her projects. So, in the first case we dealt with a scientific text deliberately excluding images and in the second case, one with consciously integrated images. Moreover, the big photographic archive of Bourdieu, nevertheless an accomplished photographer and writer of a book on photography himself, was only exhibited towards the end of his life. What is interesting is that this time they were shown as solo images, without the direct context. By way of this case study, Back posed the why-question regarding integrating visual methodology into our research. If in the 19th century (photo) graphic images were still used by social researchers like Henry Mayhew (or Black photographer Thomas Askew's collaboration with sociologist W.E.B. DuBois; an example Knowles provided in her talk), then by the mid-20th century, sociology had become a discipline of words. Although Bourdieu might have felt he would have betrayed his subject by including his photographs, Back's (2009) close readings and contextualization of some of the images shine a light on Bourdieu's pictures as a form of fragmentary, alternative history against the grain. Furthermore, Back argued that photography can be valuable as a means of accessing insights and slippages that are beyond the photographer-annex researcher's un-

derstanding or appreciation.

The second case – Knowles' closing session on consciously combining text and image – was the most research-oriented one in a classic sense. The great merit of her talk was that it summed up some of the key concerns that had emerged during the summer school. Yet, the participants could have benefited even more from it for their own visual projects had it been programmed before everyone had finished their final works. Knowles collaborates with a separate photographer. By presenting some of her past and present projects – the current one, following one pair of flips-flops through the whole chain from material over-consumption to waste problem, was a welcome addition as a special object-based project – she discussed how she negotiates between what part of the story the images can tell and what parts we need words for. With concrete examples, she tried to show how photography works in another register, relating to the unspeakable, the unspoken (often so routine, so obvious that no one notices). The most dull visual sociology is the one describing what is in the pictures, she argued. Vice versa, in his book on visual methodology, visual anthropologist Marcus Banks (2001, 144) has called images that simply illustrate some aspects of the research project a 'largely redundant visual representation of something already described in the text.' Knowles eloquently reminded

us that we use visual methodologies to get 'a more fine-grained picture'.

## 2. Photo essay

The images presented here are all part of my own final visual project, produced and presented during the summer school. This second part of the article is not only the visual output of what is discussed in the first part, but also it tries explicitly to integrate the tensions and questions reflected upon further above as a meta-theme in my images. The general research focus underlying the essay is the performativity of human behavior in London's public space<sup>3</sup>. A further overarching element of the series is the (dis)connection by eye contact. This motif reaches out of the pictures towards you, the viewers, in that the images try to actively play with the beholder's hunger for story or fiction. This intention assimilates one of the struggles during the summer school: to present our series of photographs, not only with a loosely unifying theme, but essentially with a critical narrative resulting from a clear research perspective. Like visual sociologist Pauwels (2012) contends regarding the specific expectations of the visual essay as a social science format, '[it] clearly needs to be grounded in social science and from that basis try to impart insight about the social and cultural world.' The theoretical foundation of this essay is sociologist Henri Lefebvre's (1901–1991) approach of rhythmanalysis, which

was posthumously published in 1992. Lefebvre's premise is that 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm' (Lefebvre 2004, 15). Key in rhythmanalysis is the study of everyday life in urban spaces, which is made up of diverse rhythms.

I believe that the concept of rhythmanalysis can be linked with street photography, which is the practice that is adopted for this essay. Indeed, the core of street photography is the attention for everyday life in urban public space. Although Lefebvre (2004, 36) was convinced that 'no camera, no image or series of images can show these rhythms', I follow human geographer Paul Simpson (2012, 425), who

agree[s] that an image or series of images cannot necessarily fully capture or evoke such rhythms and their qualities, [but] a series of images can be useful in rhythmanalysis and provide techniques for thinking through the rhythms of urban life.

None of the street photographs in this photo essay are staged or manipulated. Finally, street photography shares an interest in often quotidian happenings that without capturing them would otherwise go by unnoticed. The political tenor of rhythmanalysis is present in the awareness that even the most intimate elements of everyday life are

bound up with the order of the omnipresent State and the political power that 'rhythms' individuals, groups and whole societies. Rhythms are usually taken for granted, but they become clearer with their breakdown. In most of the pictures, there is a conflict or dissonance between

two or more rhythms: what Lefebvre (2004, 16) terms 'arrhythmia'. Rhythmanalysis has a political use as part of his critique of everyday life to expose, radically question and change the capitalist inscription of space and time on our biological and social rhythms.



The crux of rhythmanalysis for the Marxist philosopher Lefebvre was to investigate how citizens oppose the structuring rhythms of the state and capital by a particular use of time, or in the way they occupy spaces (Lefebvre 2004, 96). In the first picture, the small individuals march to

the beat of the City on the Millennium Bridge. Damien Hirst's £1m sculpture – rhythmically titled *Hymn* – had been tagged by the Occupy movement in April 2012. The couple appropriates the space in a non-political, but intimate way. Time seems to stand still there. For Lefebvre, hu-

mans are produced both by 'natural' rhythms of respiration and the heart and the 'social' rhythms of contemporary cultural processes. For him, these rhythms converge on the body, in 'the everyday' (Horton 2005, 159). Furthermore, for me the image reflects the discussed relationship between a single image's mere artistic merit and the transparency of the social research value. The metropolis seems to rise out of the guts of the overlooking human body; to what extent does an artistic representation (i.e. photography) incorporate life, or when does the aesthetic dominate and not only frame, but strip the social reality perceived and intended by the visual researcher? A meta-dichotomy between mimesis (the 'bare' reproduction of reality) and expression (the subjective choices that flesh out an image) can be seen in the doll, the inevitable two parts of the picture. The following contemplation of the French critic Roland Barthes (2000, 5) seems to reflect on both this aspect and the picture's content:

It is as if the photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet [or Damien Hirst?, RD]) which navigate in convoy, as though united by an eternal coitus.

The picture has a similar lovely and macabre atmosphere at the same time. The art work of a human referent overlooks the different rhythms between the entangled pair of lovers versus the stream of people.

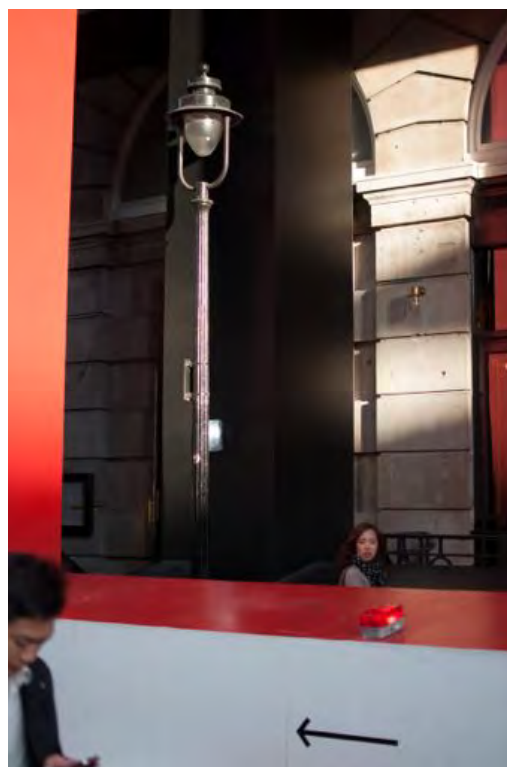




Barthes' (2000, 5) continuation builds a bridge to the second image:

The photograph has something tautological about it: a pipe here is always and intractably a pipe. It is as if the photograph – for convenience's sake, let us accept this universal, which for the moment refers only to the tireless *repetition of contingency* – always carries its referent with itself (emphasis added).

This lucky hip shot, an urban visual rhyme of forms, shapes and colors, further blends artistic representation and urban cultural reality. The repetition of (half) circular figures also seems to metaphorically hint at the cyclical rhythms of the urban everyday. Lefebvre (2004, 30) gives the example of the flows and recurrent timetables of tourists in certain parts of a city. For Lefebvre, cycles are inseparable from the second form of repetition that he sees: linear rhythm. 'The linear is the daily grind, the routine, therefore the perpetual, made up of *chance* and *encounters*' (Lefebvre 2004, 30).



The third picture, above, is also about chance encounters between strangers, the (failed) exchanges of a look and interconnectivity in the city. The rhythm strengthening this linear crossing here is that of the light, of 'the sun and the shadows, the well-lit and the gloomy corners' (Lefebvre 2004, 31). Immediately after capturing this moment, the sun beam piercing the clouds vanished and that spot was all grey again. The scene seems to take place in a narrative 'framework', encouraging the viewer's own fictions.



In the fourth picture, too, non-human dimensions of place – artifacts, such as texts and *signs* – are not mere passive backdrops, but enroll into rhythmic structures (Edensor 2010, 7). For me, the continuous digital loop of walking figures in the background reverberates with the perpetual passing by of businessmen in front of 30 St Mary Axe. The persons walking against the directionalities given by arrows and screens create a disturbing and suspicious effect. As Lefebvre (2004, 34) writes, ‘Money no longer renders itself sensible as such, even on the façade of banks. The [city] centre bears the imprint of what it hides, but it hides it. Money

passes through circulation.’ It is the imposition of bureaucratic and capitalist rhythms upon individuals in the realm of the everyday (Edensor 2010, 13).leisure activities This zone of the City definitely has an own type of rhythm, with almost exclusively men in suits, training their junior staff to dress and behave in the same way in public space. ‘Thus public space, the space of representation, becomes “spontaneously” a place for [...] encounters, *intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations – it theatralises itself*, writes Lefebvre (2004, 96 (emphasis added)).

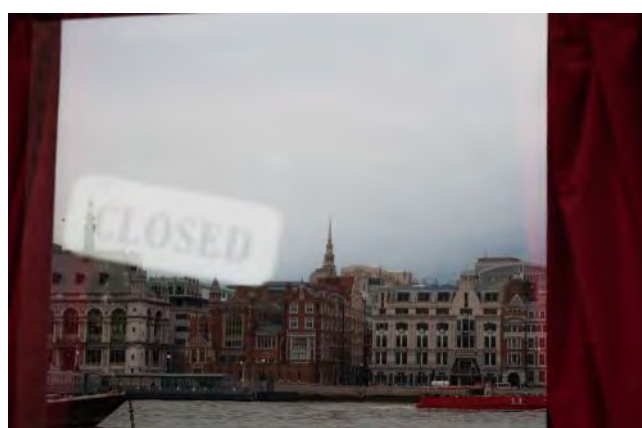
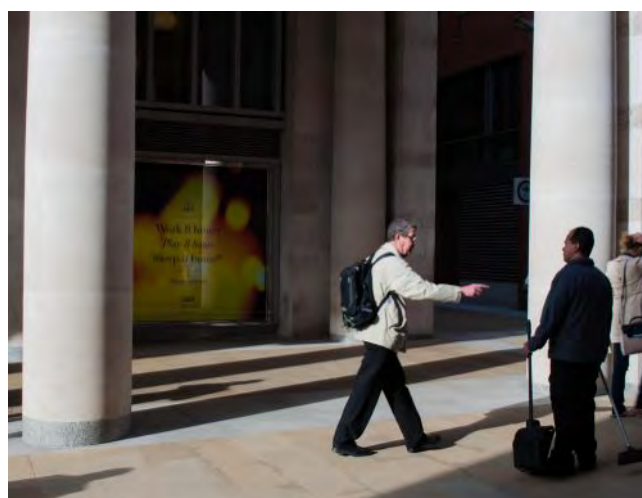
The last three images are all concerned with the relationship of words included in the image. By this

manoeuvre, I want to reflect on the struggle of textual clarification of pictures, discussed in part one. The included words are not only meta-explanatory elements, but also fundamental to the interplay between text and image.

The shadows of the previous image seem to prolong themselves into the frame of the picture above. 'Other horizons loom without being present, so beyond the sensible and visible order, which reveals political power, other orders suggest themselves: a logic, *a division of labour, leisure activities* ["Play"] are also produced' (Lefebvre 2004, 32 (emphasis added)). Against the backdrop of a 'City wisdom' that prescribes the cadence of everyday life, the expressive gesture of pointing disrupts the rhythm of endless maintenance of the material and social world by repetitive cleaners. In Barthes' (2000, 2) terms again:

Photography suggests the gesture of the child pointing his finger at something and saying: that, there it is, *but says nothings else* (...) It points a finger at certain vis-à-vis, and cannot escape this pure deictic language, [i.e. necessarily an indication by reference] (emphasis added).

For Susan Sontag (1977, 78), 'The photographer – and the consumer of photographs – follows in the footsteps of the ragpicker'. The type of the street sweeper, like the



photographer, is responsible for collecting and erasing the bits and pieces of historical layers of 'refuse of reality' (Kracauer 1960, 55). The entire figure's stance has been stilled, like the effect of a column (Wigoder 2001, 376). This suggestion of a division of class is reflected in the architecture, light and shadows. Other horizons loom without being present, so beyond the sensible and visible order, which reveals political power, other orders suggest themselves: a logic, a division of labour,

London has a reputation as 'a dynamic place', with its perpetual disruption of temporal and spatial rhythms, very much manifest in the constant cycles of redevelopment. But again, word and image become ambiguous. Who is creating a dynamic place? In the triangle of (averted) gazes that is formed between the man in the suit, the laborer and the young man, we look *with* the two protagonists. However, once this white fence goes down, these people are often rubbed out in images for city or project branding. Like in the previous pictures, own fictions can be projected upon the scene. For some Londoners at the summer school, the image of young, hooded people, for example, generated associations with the 2011 Riots. For viewers with that link, the shared point of view with the men on the bench can change the whole feeling and meaning of the picture.

By combining the two topics in

this visual essay, the artistic practice and text-image combination, the curtains in the final image close on the theatrical space that I have tried to observe and open up in this series.

### Conclusion

This article is a testimony of the reflective process and practical experience I have been through thanks to the summer school's offering, rather than an article making major claims or arguments. Nevertheless, I hope that I have been able to combine aesthetically meaningful images with critical or social insights (given the modest timeframe of production). I have tried to find my own balance in the discussed relationship between artistic goals and research-led image-making. Maybe even more than about the sociological aspect of how we perform our roles (as tourists, business men, labourers, youth, lovers ...) structured by or opposed to the rhythms that create a city, this photo essay is also about the medium of photography itself. This relates to the other point that has been brought up about the necessity of text added to images (primarily in an academic context). Although the images can stand on their own, I believe the text definitely adds value and meaning. I wanted to think through my experience with the text-image relationship at the summer school by doing the test of valorising text alongside my own photographs, instead of presenting

them with a short (oral) description. Yet, the summer school offers a great opportunity to develop a portfolio, get instructive feedback on sets of images, and the chance to see one of your pictures professionally printed as part of a small group exhibition. Participants can gain (from) a network of experienced lecturers and diverse co-students or -practitioners. In short, the summer school stimulates and forces you to think about theoretical and methodological aspects in regard to your own practice and plans with urban photography.

*International Urban Photography Summer School (iUPSS)  
Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), Goldsmiths University of London  
In collaboration with Urban Encounters  
Organized by Paul Halliday (MA in Photography and Urban Cultures Course Leader) and Beatriz Véliz Argueta (Coordinator)*

*3–15 September 2012, at Goldsmiths campus*

The 2013 Summer School will take place from 19–31 August. Deadline for applying is June 10. See also:

<http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/summer-school/>  
<http://iupss.com/>  
<http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/>

<http://www.iavu.org/>  
<http://www.urbanencounters.org/>  
<http://www.urbanphotofest.org/>  
Site Mandy Lee Jandrell: <http://www.mandyleejandrell.info/>  
Site Marco Bohr: <http://www.macobo.com/>  
Site Laura Cuch: <http://www.lauracuch.com>

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.gold.ac.uk/cucr/summer-school/>
- <sup>2</sup> The notion of the flâneur was mainly developed by Walter Benjamin, drawing on the poetry of Charles Baudelaire. The term is understood, here, as an essentially urban figure, who derives knowledge from observation through the act of walking without an a priori purpose, goal or objective.
- <sup>3</sup> In the UK, there is no legal restriction on taking photographs of people in public places and publishing them, without a model release, for non-commercial purposes.

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**Gillian Rose. 2012. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (Third edition). London: Sage. 408 pp.**

Paperback ISBN: 9780857028884, Hardcover ISBN: 9780857028877, E-book ISBN: 9781446254011.

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*Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* is the third fully revised and updated edition of Gillian Rose's bestselling book on visual methods. This new edition is richer in material and broader in purpose compared to the previous ones (2006; 2001). Almost 100 pages thicker, the 2012 edition includes a new chapter on visual ethics and an open-access compendium website that completes the book. More importantly, this is the first time the book discusses digital media, such as YouTube, videogames, online photo-sharing, and more. Since the first two editions of *Visual Methodologies* have become classics among graduate and undergraduate scholars engaged in visual studies, this review will focus mostly on the new features of this 2012 edition.

Rose's aim is to introduce the

complex debates in visual analysis and interpretation and to stimulate the reader to explore visual methodologies. She undertakes this by firstly providing a comprehensive, theoretically informed survey on researching with visual materials (Chapter 1) and secondly by proposing a critical methodology to approach visual materials (Chapter 2). Rose starts from the assumption that both what is seen and how it is seen are culturally constructed. Thus, in order to understand the social effects of visual materials, Rose provides some tools for a critical approach to interpreting found visual data, such as photos, movies, and other media products. Her analysis addresses the three sites in which the meaning of an image is constructed: the site of the production of the image, the site of the image itself and the sites where the image is received by different audiences.

Each one of these sites holds social, technological and compositional modalities (or aspects). Different visual methods provide researchers with different ways of analyzing the sites and modalities involved in the meaning of an image.

Starting from this analytical framework, Rose dedicates the central part of her book to in-depth discussions on specific methods. In a very systematic fashion, Rose explains in detail the particular attributes and limitations of each methodology through concrete examples. The methods covered in Chapters 4 to 11 are compositional interpretation; content analysis; semiology; psychoanalysis and visuality; discourse analysis with a dual focus on discourse formation and on material practices; ethnographic audience studies; and photo-documentation, photo-elicitation, and photo-essays. The final chapter presents a review on the aforementioned methods and compares them quite systematically. Rose invites researchers to mix and combine visual methods from a critical perspective. In particular, she encourages researchers to bear in mind the power relations embedded in the ways of seeing, the visualization of social difference, the agency of the image, and the embeddedness of visual images in a wider socio-cultural context. Chapter 12 is brand new; it deals with the ethics of visual research by focusing on three areas which Rose sees as particularly problematic i.e.

consent, anonymity and copyright. Fundamentally, the author wishes to provide students and researchers with the practical and theoretical tools to engage with visual materials critically, regardless of the specific method being used.

The clear structure of the book is one of its strengths; all the chapters addressing particular methodologies share the same structure. Each chapter starts with key examples, followed by the description of the method and some theoretical discussion about its usage. For each methodology, strengths and weaknesses are explicitly addressed to allow a well-directed critique and comparison between different methods. This composition enables the reader to use the book in different ways. It can be read in its entirety for a comprehensive overview, or selectively if one has an interest in particular methods. Furthermore, key terms highlighted in bold and positioned on the page margins, as well as focus boxes and final summaries, help the reader to navigate the dense and rich material of the book.

Throughout the text, Rose invites readers to explore and to engage with visual materials by referring to exercises on the website compendium, introducing focus boxes on particular concepts or empirical examples, and proposing further literature references at the end of each chapter and on the website. I find that through these materials,



Rose stimulates the reader to think and look further, as any good author is supposed to do.

The densely-packed contents cross-refer to the extended version of the book available on the companion website<sup>1</sup>, which further links to a multitude of additional online sources. The website completes the third edition of the book by offering auxiliary instruction, resources and examples, as well as interactive exercises. It is open-access and therefore freely available to the public. The structure of the website is clear and straightforward as well; it divides external resources and activities following the book chapters. It provides meaningful additional materials for those who want to deepen their focus on specific methods or simply put to work the contents of the book through applied exercises. Particularly interesting for students is the section on interactive activities, which proposes exercises to directly engage the reader with the visual materials analysis introduced in each book chapter. The section of the website about online resources recommends a wide range of external references, which are mostly insightful for researchers who are learning about visual methodology for the first time.

The book embraces two broad research fields concerned with visibility, which are rarely in dialogue: on the one hand, we have social sciences which use visual research methods as a way to pose research

questions by *producing* images, e.g. recent developments in human geography and anthropology<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, we find the tradition of visual culture studies, where researchers *analyze* found visual materials - such as photo archives and movies - as their research data. Rose applies the same framework to discussing both bodies of work.

The latest edition seems to place more stress upon the first field - namely, the *production* of visual material - than the previous editions. This change in focus is also mirrored in the title change from 'An Introduction to the *Interpretation of Visual Materials*' (2001; 2006) to 'An Introduction to *Researching with Visual Materials*' (2012) (emphasis added). This could be a response to the growing interest among social researchers in experimenting with image-making to capture the nonrepresentational aspects of the social (Pink 2007). Yet, Rose dedicates only one chapter towards the end of the book (Chapter 11) to the explicit presentation of methods for producing images and making them part of a research project, namely photo-documentation, photo-elicitation, and photo-essays. The attention, hence, is still unbalanced towards methodologies of interpretation and analysis rather than image production. Therefore, for those who want to pursue research using visual analysis and interpretation, *Visual Methodologies* provides straightforward assistance on how

to carry out such research. Readers wishing, on the other hand, to produce visual materials as a part of their research might not be left fully satisfied with this book.

In sum, I would recommend this book to undergraduates, graduate students and researchers interested in the interpretation of visual materials, since it provides an excellent introduction to the complex and developing field of visual analysis. Despite the fact that the production of images as a method is still not presented in-depth, I would define Rose's book as a must-read introduction for those interested in integrating photo and film production into their research projects. Certainly, the book offers rich insights for orientating and situating oneself in the broad panorama of visual methodologies.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sagepub.com/rose/home.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Examples may include the production of mental maps, drawings, videos, photographs, diaries, by the researcher and/or the research participants.

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**Nick Papadimitriou. 2012. *Scarp: In Search of London's Outer Limits*. London: Sceptre. 271pp. Hardback.**

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Scarp sits as a physical presence in Nick Papadimitriou's life. Living in the Northern suburbs of London, Papadimitriou has seen Scarp as the landscape in which his life is embedded and upon whose presence he has cast shadows and which has in turn cast shadows on him. Scarp is Papadimitriou's name for the North Middlesex/South Hertfordshire escarpment; this land feature that delineates the Northern margins of London is where he has spent most of his life, and with this book, where he entangles and disentangles his life and the geography of Scarp that surrounds him. Scarp gives Papadimitriou the title of his book and is his exploration into place and psyche, how man and landscape constitute each other. The book is part memoir, part investigation into a particular geography, and part archive of regional memory. *Scarp* weaves together layers of observation, interpretation, memory,

history, anecdote, archive, geology and geography. Papadimitriou shows us that landscape is not passive, not just to be regarded or traversed, but contains overlooked interpenetrations of which the history of our landscape and our own histories and memories are absorbed into. In *Scarp*, we see place as a source of knowledge, one which can be mined, in Papadimitriou's own words, as 'a storage vat of regional memory' (dir. Rogers 2009). Using close observation of landscape and drawing on archival material, in some cases scavenged from the very sites he visits and incorporates into his own personal archive, Papadimitriou tells us the story of this particular geography of London in its many forms: geological, cultural and historical.

The information that Papadimitriou gathers manifests itself in his written words and comes from a highly visual and physical

practice: the practice he describes as Deep Topography. The acts of walking and observing the geography of these particular parts of London concern themselves deeply with the particularities of place, employing anecdote, myth and its evocations intertwined with fact. Papadimitriou creates highly detailed and knowledgeable accounts of the sites he visits allied to recollections of his past and speculations on the past lives of others. These speculations are not mythologies that might obscure the historical truths, but are evocations of lost memories, the underrepresented or unacknowledged, to make coherent and reconnect that which history has scattered across the region he investigates. His stories veer from memories of his incarceration as a youth for arson (69–71), his voice assuming that of a friend from his past as he/they recount the drug-taking episodes and communal living in 1970s London suburbia (162–185). His descriptions of the rivers that flow downwards from the high land of Scarp evoke those valleys that determine the infrastructure of this geographical part of London.

This navigation through lives lived and places inhabited and observed reminds us of our belief in history as truth. In Papadimitriou's hands, history and truth are subordinate to memory and chance. The act of resurrecting that which is lost is vital, and we are reminded of his contemporary Iain Sinclair's words

when Sinclair describes such written practices: 'Memory-Prints of the lost are arranged, in the hope that such a ritual will restore the missing person, the loved one: daughter, brother, husband, father' (Sinclair 2007, 1–2). His motivation is to make sense of place not only through the previous incarnations of its archived regional history, the texts that it has already created, but also to link that which is known to that which has become obscured. We are asked to regard that which seems lost but is hidden in plain sight if we only look a while longer. It is an exploration of physical manifestations in site or place which are beyond, as Papadimitriou describes, our 'self-concern and an inward looking and anthropocentric culture' (1).

This close reading of site or place is his methodology of Deep Topography and it begins with the act of entering the landscape: the act of walking. Papadimitriou describes the beginnings of this practice often through memories of his youthful wanderings to escape a troubled family life and the sorrows he felt (210–27). In these early years we might hear the echoes of Walter Benjamin's Paris in Papadimitriou's melancholic steps. The streets that rise over Scarp might provide the intoxication that:

... comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly through the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum; ever

weaker grow the temptations of bistros, of shops, of smiling women, ever more irresistible the magnetism of the next streetcorner, of a distant square in the fog, of the back of a woman walking before him (Benjamin 1999, 880).

However, Papadimitriou is not the Parisian flâneur evoked by Benjamin, but a rather more directed individual. For the suburban walker Papadimitriou, place has determined and enabled his practice; the intoxication that comes through his practice of walking culminates on the true edgelands, the meeting point of city and country. This is the territory where *Scarp's* geographical and geological imperative asserts itself on the city and where its dominance subsides to the rising power of *Scarp*. This is the visual landscape of *Scarp*, a physical, material being that absorbs and emits its histories and memories to those who observe closely enough, whilst shaping the city that descends from its slopes (228–46).

What is compelling is that Papadimitriou's research methods truly enable an evocation of place. The possibilities of the visual re-engagement with site and place in Papadimitriou's practice does not overtly expose criticality of how our landscape is managed, how our sense of belonging to the landscape is controlled or mediated, but instead suggests how memory becomes contingent and contestable

through our active engagement with place. Papadimitriou does, however, recognise the political environment in which his work is placed when he explains that 'The deeper implication is that the world that confronts us through our immediate surroundings is alive and intrinsically linked in valuable ways not amenable to instrumental reason or economic reductionism' (11).

The Deep Topographic methodology also differentiates itself from psychogeography in its many guises. The Situationist movement of 1950s and 60s Paris, with its highly political motivations of the *dérive*, avowed the act of walking as a means of opening up the city to different mechanisms of understanding. Psychogeography emerged from this practice of walking and suggested one's ability to emotionally connect with the city in the face of architecture and systems of city management that alienate the individual from their city (Debord, Chetglov and Jorn ed. 1997). These Situationist beginnings influenced Papadimitriou's contemporaries such as Iain Sinclair and Will Self who echoed the leftist criticality of their Parisian forebears, and spurned a London-centric modern psychogeography that permeated many late 20th- and early 21st-century literary and artistic practices concerned with place. Papadimitriou's research practices do not overtly impress a political project, but rather share similarities

with filmmaker Patrick Keiller and his fictional researcher, Robinson. Deep Topography engages more deliberately with place and its materials than the Situationist *dérive* and its ensuing psychogeographic research practices and outputs. Deep Topography concerns itself with the material of landscape; it also shares some similarities in casting a gaze upon the overlooked ecologies of the city that have been expressed and evoked in the works of Richard Mabey where the social and architectural collide with the ecological in conflict at the edgelands.

Deep Topography allows for a research practice that embraces the full visuality of place, to encourage the closest readings of sites at their most visceral. It enables a re-engaging with place as a source of knowledge in all its obscured and obscuring modes, and allows for reflection on the information gathered to unfold a deeper understanding of the city, its suburbs and the peripheral landscapes surrounding us. In the book's Appendix, a transcript found by Papadimitriou called 'Perry Kurland's Journal', Kurland describes Deep Topography as 'passing through the land's eye' (254). It recognises that history is diffuse and eludes fixity much as we attempt to contain it. Memory and its evocations can issue forth from the visual and material world in many guises as we understand how memory is absorbed into the fabric of landscape and re-emitted. Finally,

it focuses on how our observations give way to knowledge after 'a return to home at day's end, after the exhaustion, a rising into something that is more than personal recollection: rather, it is the land's very structure and memory unfurling in the mind' (255).

Papadimitriou's book shows us his insight into the geography of Scarp and allows us through his eyes to see Scarp's structure and memory unfurl before us. I believe the use of such methods in their quiet criticality exposes a pressing political need for the public to engage with place. Place is increasingly becoming socially controlled; public space continues to be appropriated by private ownership, instrumentalised and employed solely for commercial imperatives that alienate and displace communities. Such trends determine under whose guardianship our civic environment is placed, exposing the undemocratic nature of how place is managed. Deep Topography avows place as a source of knowledge. This practice 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. Observing and interpreting the intersections of the physical, material and immaterial of cultural memory of place through Deep Topographic analysis could be an invaluable and essential tool for many of us. This practice and its methods are com-

elling, for those of us concerned with the built environment; for architects, town planners, urbanists and the public, these mechanisms of observation may assist us in demanding and creating the social re-development and democratisation of place.

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**J. Gary Knowles, Teresa C. Luciani, Ardra L. Cole  
and Lorri Neilsen eds. 2007. *The Art Of Visual  
Inquiry* (Volume 3, Arts-Informed Inquiry Series).  
Backalong Books & Centre for Arts-Informed  
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*The Art of Visual Inquiry*, third in the Arts-Informed Inquiry series, is a collection of essays primarily intended for artists, practice-led doctoral researchers and social science researchers who are currently pursuing or have completed doctoral degrees. The contributors focus on their art practices, specific research projects and exhibitions. Certain essays revolve around the theoretical discourse surrounding the definition of research-led art practices. Divided into three main sections, *On*, *Through* and *For*, the book focuses on the intersection of art and social sciences. A key definition is provided in the introduction of the book to explain that 'by arts informed research we mean research that brings together the systematic and rigorous qualities of social science inquiry with the creative and

imaginative qualities of the arts'(xii).

The writers included in this anthology are artists or arts professionals in the education sector. They are writing from their own perspective on their work, practice or specific exhibitions. The book begins by noting a type of dissatisfaction with research or arts-based research. I gathered that the dissatisfaction has to do with the problems surrounding the relatively new standing of the art practice-led PhD or, as Dieter Lesage states in *Who's Afraid of Artistic Research? On Measuring Artistic Research Output*, 'the beginning of a fierce battle for the definition of research (2009, 12).

In the first section of the book, *On*, the chapters focus on how research as inquiry is done and what artists choose to focus on in their practices. A connection between



visuality and photography is made. Moreover, the question of visuality versus the verbal is brought to light. Many of the chapters are written in a personal narrative style about artist's practices. There are some references to alternative methods and methodologies when considering visual inquiry; however, I think there needs to be more detail on these alternative methods in relation to how this book, and series, is asserting itself within the realm of arts-informed research. The most compelling chapter in this section is by Alexandra Cuther, in her text 'Boundary Hunters, Art for the Sake of Research'. When writing about critics of practice-based PhDs, Cuther writes that 'these critics have also argued that the art produced in arts informed inquiry would not "cut it" in the art world, and that it tends to be therapeutic, narcissistic, banal and solipsistic' (77). The art of a practice-led PhD should be able to defend itself outside of its theoretical framework. I think this is a central question and concern in the wider discourse surrounding practice-led PhDs: namely, at what point and in what instance is the art illustrative? The notion of the artwork being aesthetically superior arises, and I think this would have made for an intriguing chapter if it could have been elaborated.

The second section of the book, *Through*, is about process. The chapters begin with the process of silence, craft in quilting and theo-

ries of walking. In Chapter 11, de Cosson, Irwin, Kind and Springgay state that 'visual inquiry advocates a position of being in the presence of research. This space of in-betweenness is a shifting place where identities collide and work together in tension' (137). This idea of an interstitial space for potential thoughts outside of binary thinking is very appealing, and something Jan Verwoert has written about (see Verwoert 2008). Again, this concept and discussion of what the potentialities could be is something that I would have liked to have seen expanded upon in the chapters or book as a whole. An interesting question of documentation comes into play, which is also seen in Chapter 7, 'Boundary Hunters: Art for the Sake of Research', with regards to the documentation of an artist's own large format paintings in an archival manner for a portfolio. Again, this is something the two chapters could have engaged with in more detail as a rich discourse on the relationship between the archive and the artist that exists in art theory.

The third and final section of the book is called *For*. This section is concerned with why artists make the work they make. In Chapter 23, 'Context Matters: Visual Inquiry and Qualities of Engagement', Maura McIntyre and Ardra Cole state that 'research becomes a site of aesthetic contemplation, when feelings, intellect, and perception are given space to come together to make

meaning' (313). This is a good summary of the role of this book as a whole, and indicates why I think certain readers would find it of interest. The final chapter, 'Viewing the Visual in Theses and Dissertations' by Sameshima, Sbrocchi and Knowles, concludes well with descriptions and analysis of actual practice-led PhDs and examples of graphic design elements in their dissertations, in which they incorporate the dissertation or text as an artwork.

With relation to Maria Lind's definition of the curatorial as 'An endeavor that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against It' (2009, 1), could there be an aspect or element of the curatorial in the Canadian definition of arts-informed research? The artwork seems to be a beginning point for much of the writing in the book. Furthermore, Kathrin Busch, in 'Artistic Researcher and the Poetics of Knowledge' writes:

Another form of artistic research is art that understands itself as research, in that scientific processes or conclusions become the instrument of art and are used in the artworks ... This is where art and science begin to blur, insofar as scientific argumentation and artistic criterion are seamlessly intertwined, and artistic work does not claim to produce a 'work' in the classic sense of the term, but rather (often critical)

knowledge, so as to use artistic means to analyze the present day and its social conditions and their structures (2009, 9).

This may be closer to how the editors and writers define their practices or arts-informed research. The potentialities and the open-ended questions are the most interesting aspects of the book for me. These types of questions garner and generate provocative discussions with regards to how we define practice-led or based research and its methodologies.

The *Art of Visual Inquiry* is reliant on the Canadian context, and definition of PhDs and references to the Canadian structure and its funding concerns are noted throughout the book. This book will still appeal to doctoral researchers in other countries, as the essays are mainly personal accounts and descriptions of art works. The book, and series, aims to create a wider discourse in the field of research-led art practice. This is a tightly woven series of essays and I imagine it should be read as part of the overall series of books. As it stands alone, without having read the previous two books in the series, I was hoping for more links and connections to the overarching theoretical concerns of research in art practice, and references that would tie the art practices together, beyond the constant references to Roland Barthes. Nonetheless, it remains a thought-provoking look

into how artists write about their own work, how they are defining research-led art practice and the question of the visual in the process of inquiry.

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**Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco. 2012. *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*. New York: Nation Books. 302 pp. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781568586434**

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Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco are acclaimed for their writing in and on war-torn areas of the world. Hedges wrote as a foreign correspondent for *The New York Times* for 15 years, where he covered conflict in Central America, Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans. There he was part of a team awarded the 2002 Pulitzer Prize in Journalism for reportage on global terrorism. The same year, he was presented with the Amnesty International Global Award for Human Rights Journalism. Sacco is best known for his graphic novel-style reporting and comic/cartoon illustration in the books *Safe Area Goražde* (2000) about the Bosnian War and *Palestine* (1993) for which he received the 1996 American Book Award.

In *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, the two authors join forces to cover a different type of conflict on a more domestic front: American class war. Playing to one another's

strengths, they combine vivid historical context and individual narratives with graphic illustration for a powerful one-two punch on increasing inequality and corresponding injustices in America. The book consists of an introduction and five chapters, each of which profiles a specific geographical location in the United States. As much an exercise in what C. Wright Mills (1959) called 'the sociological imagination' as what many social scientists would quickly defame as 'journalism', *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* provides rich history of these areas while literally illustrating the story of the individuals who inhabit them in comic book/graphic novel style. Based on two years of field research and interviews, the resulting intersections of history and biography provide strong examples of both the power elite and those recently referred to as the 'preariat'.

The introduction clearly states

the polemic nature of what is to follow, and also outlines the goals of such research. Hedges writes:

Joe Sacco and I set out two years ago to take a look at the sacrifice zones, those areas in the country that have been offered up for exploitation in the name of profit, progress, and technological advancement. We wanted to show in words and drawings what life looks like when the marketplace rules without constraints, where human beings and the natural world are used and then discarded to maximize profit. We wanted to look at what the ideology of unfettered capitalism means for families, communities, workers and the ecosystem (XI).

They end with a host of descriptive statistics regarding trends of inequality and injustice in America, including the highest poverty rate, greatest income inequality and lowest social mobility among industrialized nations and the highest prison population per capita (XIV). While the information and images contained in the book are often bleak, the presentation via the graphic novel/comic book format is engaging and compelling. This format allows the reader to experience both textual narrative (personal as well as historical), and visual portraits and landscapes simultaneously. The images are not simply illustrations or 'figures' used to provide ex-

amples to support the text, but are rather an integral part of the work. As such, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* is a wonderful example of the sociological imagination expressed through a visual methodology.

Chapter 1 takes the reader to Pine Ridge, South Dakota. Titled 'Days of Theft', it chronicles a history of 'ethnic cleansing, degradation and murder stretching back more than a century and a half' (4). The poverty and violence of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation is contrasted with the wealth of neighboring Whiteclay, 'An unincorporated village that exists for only a block and a half', that 'exists to sell beer and malt liquor' (2). Explaining the white conquest of Indian lands through the story of Custer, broken treaties for resource extraction, and other forms of cultural assault, the authors point out how the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian 'makes no mention of the genocide, starvation, burning of Indian villages, rape, or forced death marches such as the 1838 Trail of Tears' (12).

It is within the context of this history that the authors tour the reservation with Charlie Abourezk, an attorney active in American Indian rights. Abourezk was present in the 1970s when Pine Ridge was consumed with violence during a conflict between the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the paramilitary GOON's (Guardians of the Oglala Nation) of tribal chairman

Richard Wilson. The authors spend an afternoon with Ivis Long Visitor, Jr. who lives where two FBI agents and an American Indian activist were killed in a shootout in 1975. An interview with Michael Red Cloud, descendant of Chief Red Cloud, becomes an illustrated life history, and the chapter takes them to AIM spiritual leader and medicine man Leonard Crow Dog, as well as Duane Brewer, a former Bureau of Indian Affairs officer and enemy of AIM. Throughout, Sacco's pen and ink portraits and landscapes provide powerful visual complements to the textual material. Likewise, the graphic novel format allows for a collaborative construction where history and biography, past and present, personal and political intersect.

Chapter 2 begins in a bakery in Camden, New Jersey where the story of aspiring business owners turns quickly to a tale of rival street gangs, the Bloods and Crips. The postindustrial history of Camden is given through Hedges' stirring description and Sacco's powerful drawings of the streets, including a tent city and an interview with its self-proclaimed mayor, Lorenzo "Jamaica" Banks. The artist's style provides a visual stream of portraits, landscapes and narrative that further brings to life the stories of the people, places and history of the city.

This venue provides the perfect context for a discussion of the poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, crime and corruption that plagues

Camden, and other cities like it. The authors compare the once thriving industrial city home to the New York Shipbuilding Corporation and the Campbell Soup Company to the now desolate wasteland run by political boss George E. Norcross III through the life history of seventy-six year old Joe Balzano.

The stories of Lolly Davis and Father Michael Doyle are used to 'mine beauty out of the gutters of Camden' (113) and the chapter concludes near the grave of Walt Whitman and Nicholas Virgilio.

Chapter 3 transports the authors, and the reader, from this urban landscape to the Appalachian mountains, where Larry Gibson exposes the human and environmental effects of mountaintop removal coal mining. They explain how 'That destruction, like the pillaging of natural resources in the ancient Mesopotamian, Roman and Mayan empires, is one of willful if not always conscious self-annihilation' (130).

The life story of Rudy Kelly, a ninety year old man in Welch, WV with black lung from forty years working in coal mines, provides plenty of background for the current state of WV. Similar to Pine Ridge and Camden, the poverty, addiction and other social problems of the Appalachian region is juxtaposed with the profit of coal companies and the corruption of government leaders.

Stories of activists against mountaintop removal mining are

told and illustrated along with those of OxyContin addicts, and Don Blankenship, former CEO of Massey Energy who vacationed in the French Riviera with WV Supreme Court justice Spike Maynard just before the court reversed a 76 million dollar judgment against his company. The Battle for Blair Mountain past and present and the last words of Jacob Vowell, killed in a mine explosion in 1902, provide a stopping point, if not closure.

In Chapter 4 we wait for work in the tomato fields of Immokalee, Florida with Rodrigo Ortiz, a twenty-six year old farmworker. A history of migrant farmworkers and a look into the lives of those currently involved takes the authors from the fields of Immokalee to the offices of the C.I.W., the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. There they learn of the horrible conditions that exist in the American food chain. They describe cases of modern-day slavery prosecuted within the last two decades and compare convict labor in the late nineteenth century with the more modern version. They quote a planter from 1883, who said 'If a man had a good nigger, he could afford to take care of him....But these convicts: we don't own 'em. One dies, get another' (196), and a grower from the 1960 television exposé *Harvest of Shame*, who said 'We used to own our slaves, now we just rent them' (196). The stories of Don Paquito and a woman they call Ana provide strong narra-

tive and visual examples of how little this has changed in the past few decades. However, a discussion of the recent successes of the C.I.W. provides evidence for hope.

The final chapter, 'Days of Revolt', takes place in New York City and specifically Zucotti Park, the initial site of the Occupy Wall Street movement. The stories of activists 'Ketchup', Kevin Zeese, John Friesen and Tim DeChristopher provide examples for the authors' comparison of the Occupy movement to similar movements in East Germany and Prague. Invoking Sheldon Wolin's (2008) 'inverted totalitarianism', they discuss the obstacles and difficulties faced by a movement for social justice in the current social and political climate. In the company of such historic movements as the Arab Spring and the *indignados* in Spain, however, Hedges and Sacco conclude with optimism that another world is indeed possible.

A scathing critique of corporate capitalism, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in issues of history, political economy, power, conflict, social movements and social change. For those social scientists interested in visual methodology, however, it is a must-read. Just as the authors seamlessly move from historical to personal and past to present, they create a dance between textual and visual. While there are pages of text without images and vice-versa, neither seems

to overwhelm or simply complement the other. Instead, the result is a true collaboration whereby illustrations narrate, narratives illustrate and the combination provides a powerful story (and image) of some harsh political and economic realities throughout America's past and present. A masterpiece of Weber's (1949) *verstehen*, Sacco's pen and ink illustrations, alongside the thick description of Hedges and their interviewees, allows the reader to transcend boundaries of space and time in order to empathize with the personal troubles of those most affected by greater public issues, those in the sacrifice zones.

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