

Abstracts

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Prospects for visual sociology. Highlights and blind spots of current sociological debates

This special issue of the journal *Soziale Welt* collects essays that deal with theoretical and methodological aspects of a ‘Visual Sociology’. They discuss the impact of increased visualization for society and science from different perspectives. Thereby they contribute to an important debate on the consequences of changing technical and media opportunities for sociological research practice and sociological theorising.

Markus Schroer

The Struggle for Attention in Visual Culture

In this essay visual culture is not only understood in terms of an ongoing and increasing process of consuming visual materiality, but as the very production of it. Contemporary discourse about visual culture highlight the dominance of the visual and the growing importance of images on all levels of (post)modern societies. Consequently, in order gain significance the language of images has to be adopted. To gain attention is to become visible. With the aid of an analytical attention-model that distinguishes four different forms of existence in visual culture, this paper shows that the position of human and other actors is dependent upon the capability to make themselves visible or invisible, or of how others can make them visible or invisible.

Jo Reichertz

Visual Expression as Textual Communication?

This paper discusses the possibility of transforming content and meaning, which is fixed by (moving-) images of any kind, into sign-based content and meaning without loss and to retain it afterwards, in the context of socioscientific research. Following a hermeneutic approach, this can be achieved if one conceives the images that are to be interpreted as social acts and not as esthetic structures and patterns. In effect, this requires to differentiate between the performed act (the act shown with the image) and the act of indicating (meaning indicating with the image). Both types of social acts are already socially typified and within this type they are describable and noticeable.

Larissa Schindler and Michael Liegl

Practice-trained Vis-ability: On the methodological foundation of video-analysis in visual sociology

Video recordings offer great advantages for qualitative social science research. They do, however, come with tricky limitations. The paper picks up on the debate about prudent use of video recordings in sociological research, sounding out the specific potential of this instrument of inquiry, analysis and presentation (of findings). Looking at research on „professional vision“ in science studies we try to outline the constructive nature of these practices, which manufacture visual traces into evidence. In order to avoid implicit realism we argue for taking seriously practice-trained vis-ability as a necessary anchor point for the use of video recordings (in qualitative social research). Such an approach allows the researcher to take advantage of technical conservation and equally to reflect its principles of construction. Only in this way is it possible to see through the camera and at the same time past it.

Christian Meyer and Ulrich von Wedelstaedt

Scopic Sociality. Regimes of Visualization and Visual Practices in Boxing

The paper explores the complexity and variety of visual practices in social interaction using the example of boxing. At first sight a boxing match seems to be a physical fight between two parties, in which bodily strength and technical skills play significant roles for victory or defeat. The present case study, however, shows that visual practices of different people involved in the fight play an important role, too. These practices relate to nested and overlapping “scopic regimes” in boxing, requiring the visualization of actions as well as their concealment. This includes the boxer’s ostentatious implementation of instructions that are vocally shouted into the ring by the coach as well as the boxer’s demonstrative compliance with the boxing rules addressed at the referee, his performance of having successfully punched or of not having been hit by his opponent addressed at the scoring judges or his display of athletic fitness, moral integrity and bold vitality in regard to the spectators. All these specific forms of visibility are simultaneously performed, each addressed at its respective addressee, by the boxer in his individual actions. Not least in the area of boxing is scopic practice an activity distributed between athlete and coach that manipulates the visibilities, but also physical activities in relation to visual expectations of all parties present (opponents, judges, spectators). Seeing then becomes an intersubjective, cooperatively produced social good.

Ajit Singh

„The quality of tension“ – A videographic study on visual communication of embodied knowledge in trampoline jumping

Using video-recordings of coach-athlete interactions, this paper discusses the importance of the body producing social situations, in which physical and visual activities are transformed into knowledge. From a sociology of knowledge perspective possible connections between Visual Sociology and Sociology of the Body are explored, providing theoretical and empirical perspectives, for analyzing body-centered interactions in sports. The example of a training

situation in the sport of trampoline will show how actors orient to each other in the interactional process, produce new forms of knowledge and update socially shared stocks of knowledge by using visual and tactile resources. The result of the sequential video-based analysis leads to the intersubjective production of a “body tension” as a special knowledge, which is relevant for the performance of trampolining.

Dirk vom Lehn, Helena Webb, Christian Heath and Will Gibson

Assessing Distance Vision as Interactional Achievement. A Study of Commensuration in Action

The paper explores the organization of the Distance Vision Test as a process through which optometrists derive an objective test score from subjective assessments of their clients' quality of reading out lines of letters. The analysis of video-recorded optometric consultations explores how the standard letter-chart features in the interaction between optometrist and client. It examines specific fragments of test procedures to reveal how aspects of the chart are used by optometrist and client to practically organize the test and to determine the quality of clients' distance vision. The paper argues that the objective definition of the test result requires that optometrists carefully introduce clients to the test procedure to avoid the reading quality and the test result being influenced by influences such as anxiety. Only after this introduction to the test, clients are encouraged to read a line of letters that follows a larger line they had difficulty to read out from the chart. The quality of the reading out of this line then is transformed into the visual acuity score. This process of transforming incommensurable qualities, reading out and seeing, into quantities in order to make them comparable, is called commensuration.

Oliver Dimbath

Visual Stimuli in Qualitative Research. Potential and Limits of the Photo-elicitation Interview

Many versions of qualitative-interpretative research focus on reconstruction that refers to data from memory based interviews. It is important, which kind of stimulus the researcher sets in order to evoke the disclosure of relevant information. In this function visual media lived in the shadow of purely oral interviewing. The article seizes the photo-based technique of interviewing and discusses the method of photo-elicitative questioning as an approach to reflecting and reconstructing past experiences. This provides an alternative to oral forms of qualitative interviewing and provides new forms to deal with the problems of individual's remembering.

Katharina Miko

Visual „Nosing Around“. On the Theoretical Grounding of Communicating Visual Knowledge

The current sociological preoccupation with the visual is very popular. In this paper, the key argument goes beyond the collection of visual data, the analysis of visual material and the theoretical and empirical consequences for the subject. This article wants to deal with a less illuminated aspect: the visual knowledge production and visual communication in sociology itself. The article argues that because of the growth of the visual in social processes, it is important to question the extent of written theory in sociological construction and communication. The growth of the visual challenges the discipline and therefore visual representation is on question. Along the example of sociological filming, this article contributes to the theoretical foundation of visual knowledge production and communication.

Bina Elisabeth Mohn

Differences of a showing Ethnography. Paths of Vision and Interfaces of Camera-Ethnography

How does a ‘showing’ ethnography succeed? Which methodological implications does it have to orientate ethnographic research towards processes of seeing and showing? The paper explores these questions from the perspective of camera-ethnography. In general, it is expected that a camera offers technical reproductions which are more or less similar to what is represented. In the context of camera-ethnographic methodology, however, the unfolding of an observing difference proves to be the criterion of quality of the processes of ethnographic visualization. The latter cuts paths of vision and enables selections during the use of a camera, thereby differing fundamentally from the sociological use of the camera as a mere documenting technology. This paper outlines the differences that a showing ethnography may produce: differences of the visual, of gazes and images, of the subject of investigation and of the situation become addressed.

Christian Thiel

The noteworthy note. Banknotes in the focus of a visual sociology

This paper analyses the visuality of banknotes. It systematizes the current (scarce) state of research by using a heuristic of art history. The paper illustrates the historical change of the visual motifs, the influence of the context of production and the messages banknotes try to communicate. The deduced assumption is that the layout of banknotes is arbitrary in its motifs, but has to be embedded in the typical picture language of money.