# 4th International Visual Methods Conference

**Editorial**

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**Cover Photograph by Ray Gibson**

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Fourth International Conference on Visual Methods

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# Introduction

The Fourth International Conference on Visual Methods was hosted by the University of Brighton in September 2015. It brought together many imaginative and hugely productive collaborations between academics, practitioners and community groups from various cities and regions of the UK, Europe and beyond.  Like most conferences, our programme consisted of presentations and keynote speeches, but we also included screenings, exhibitions and workshops. Much of this took place in the University but we extended our reach by opening the doors of the University to the local community and holding screenings and exhibitions in public spaces across the city.  This special edition of Visual Methodologies strives to capture the richness and diversity of the programme; it offers some detailed first hand accounts of projects and papers presented at the conference, as well as exploring the wider role of visual methods in contemporary research practice.  Our cover features one of Ray Gibson's iconic pebble faces taken on Brighton Beach and used as part of the Great Pebble Dash, one of the projects which took conference delegates out of the University and into the city.

Image 1.  An image of a participant in RE/F/r:ace, Andy Best-Dunkley's participatory video artwork, projected onto the Brighton Unitarian Church.          Image by Ray Gibson

Image 2. A photograph from the collection by Winckler et al. projected onto the walls of the Circus Street School.

Image by Ray Gibson

**Dawn Mannay's** introductory article unpicks the range of empirical, theoretical and artistic themes addressed throughout the conference. She describes how Gillian Rose's introductory keynote set the tone by challenging us to explore inter-disciplinary approaches to the increasing and seemingly endless proliferation of imagery across everyday life. The two other keynotes from Joe Lambert and Wendy Brawer focused on specific themes within the conference programme.

**Andy Best-Dunkley** and **Julia Winckler, Adrienne Chambon** and **Selma Montford** presented papers to the conference and exhibited work at two different locations in Brighton. **Best –Dunkley's** project RE/F/r:ace enabled members of the public to upload personal images to a discrete site before they were projected by the artist on to a nearby public building (See Image 1); his paper in this collection provides an account of how such "a magical, surprising, chaotic event" can confound our expectations and perceptions of the urban space.

**Winckler et al.** focus on a collection of photographs of children from the Carlton Hill area in Brighton, one of the oldest working class neighbourhoods, taken during the 1930s. Photographs from the collection were also exhibited in the main City library and selected images were projected on to the walls of the Circus Street School (See Image 2), the last original Victorian school in the area. Her article describes how carefully used archival photographs can intervene in social reality to reframe the way we think about the past, the present and the future.

**Wendy Brawer's** keynote looked forward to explore the ways visual mapping of cities can be used as a means to enable citizens to enact change in their communities.

**Rebecca Noone's** account of From Here to Now; describes her on-going art research project that uses line drawings of directions provided by members of the public to elicit a spatial representation of a particular city. When they are collected together these images become a vernacular representation of a particular city (See Image 3). Noone's map of Brighton was created, curated and exhibited as part of the conference.

**Philippa Lyon** and **Martha Turland** use a series of interviews with health care professionals to consider how drawings made during consultations with patients convey diagnostic and technical information in a way that can be contextualised and personalised. They consider whether these particular drawing practices can be illuminated by Barthes' comic strip theories of 'relay', in which drawings pinpoint meanings that would otherwise circulate more ambiguously.



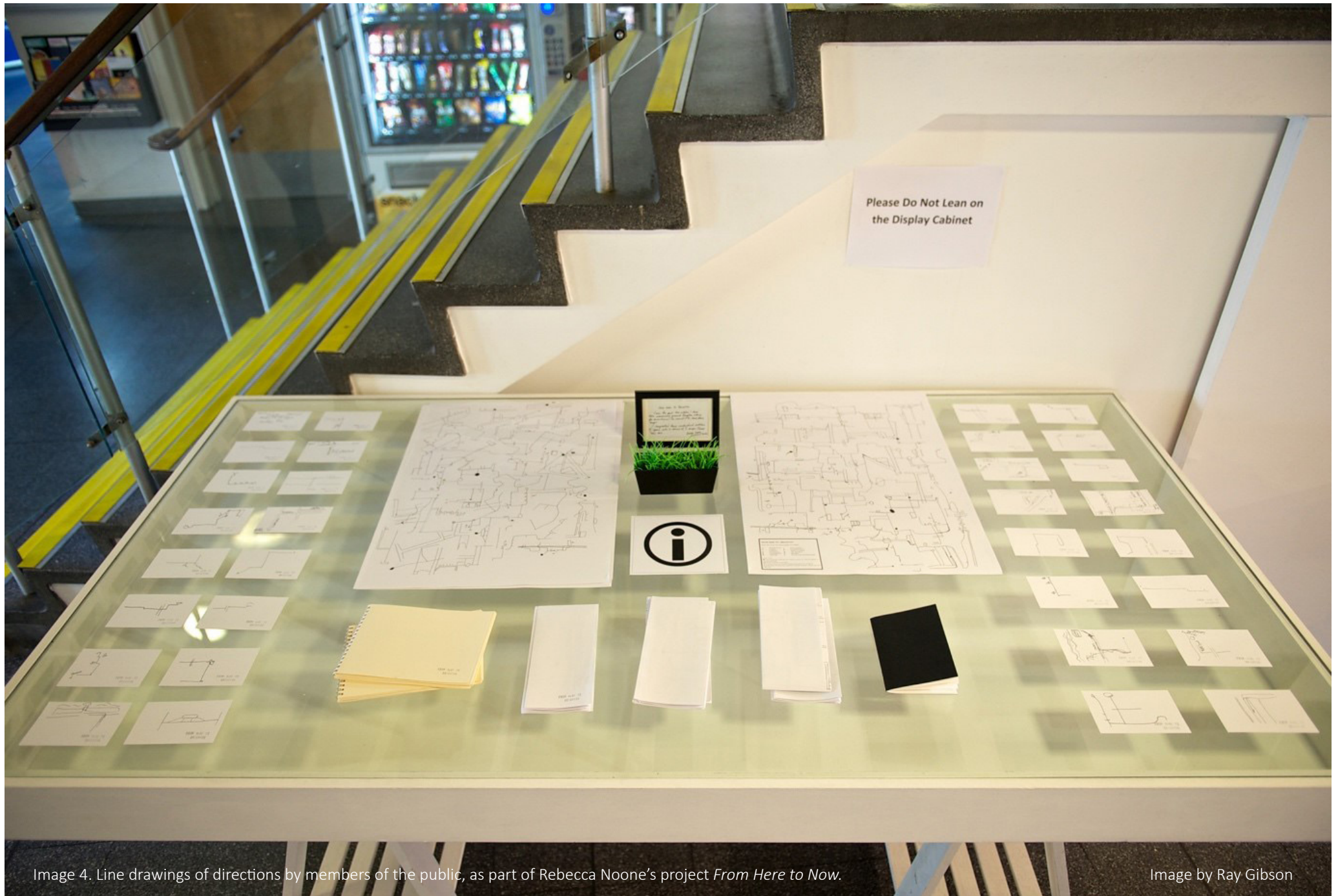Image 3. Scriberia image of Joe Lambert's keynote.

Image 4. Line drawings of directions by members of the public, as part of Rebecca Noone's project *From Here to Now*.

Image by Ray Gibson

Digital Storytelling and participatory media were distinctive themes in the conference and a special workshop of the Participatory Video Network was hosted at the University on the day before the conference. Joe Lambert's keynote set out the history and framework of digital storytelling.

**Heather Lynch's** provocation challenges Digital Storytelling to consider the ethical and ideological underpinnings of an emergent form that is gaining traction in academic research and community based practice. She calls for practitioners and academics interested in developing Digital Storytelling to move beyond an understanding based on project outcomes focussed on identity politics towards a fuller understanding of commonality that "exceeds identity and property". Jackie Shaw uses her own research with communities in India and Kenya as a means to interrogate social representation and inclusion within participatory media. Her provocation explores the assumptions underpinning the development, production and exhibition of material and asks us to conceive of participatory media as one aspect of a longer term learning process involving progressive cycles of production rather than simply the production of a particular artefact.

**Evert Lindquist's** provocation stems from his background in public policy development and it challenges us to think about the use of visual methodologies as a cross disciplinary means to inform and shape strategic thinking, public decision making and the design of services. **Anna Wilson's** paper explores the changing use of imagery in everyday life and focuses specifically on the visualisation of networks as a means to demonstrate both the ubiquity of a previously relatively rare form of image, and the complexities within different visual representations of the same phenomena. She argues that the choices made in creating specific visualisations vary so a fuller understanding requires the viewer to consider both the data and the construction of the image. The collection concludes with **Jenna Hartel's** article which uses her work through the iSquare research programme as a starting point for a discursive consideration of different approaches to visual analysis. iSquare has grown from its Canadian roots into an international project with active participants in 12 countries across the globe. It is characterised as an iterative adventure driven by curiosity, openness and research rigour; it is an ongoing project that, in many ways, stands as a metaphor for the entire conference.

This collection does not strive to provide a definitive record of the conference, instead it seeks to stimulate thinking about the ways different visual methods are being approached, used and understood by practitioners and academics. The intention is to contribute towards a fuller, more rounded understanding of the practical



Image 5. Scriberia image of Wendy Brawer's keynote.

drivers and research dynamics underpinning a contested area of work that is being actively shaped by fluid ideas, theories and practices.  In doing this, we hope to move beyond the sense of immediacy that characterises many projects to probe more deeply into the conceptual and theoretical issues faced by practitioners and academics.

Finally, we 'd like to thank all those who contributed to the conference, especially those who contributed articles to this journal.  We're particularly grateful to Anne Boddington, Ross Clark, Chris High, Lesley Murray, Bethan Prosser, Paul Sermon and Claire Wintle who all worked generously with us to programme the conference and the associated events over a 15 month period.

The Fifth International Conference on Visual Methods, led by Terence Heng at Singapore Institute of Technology from 16- 18 August 2017, is the next opportunity to move these debates forward.  We're already looking forward to it.

Mark Dunford, Conference Director
Isobel Creed, Conference Convenor

Fourth International Conference on Visual Methods – September 2015

October 2016



Image 6. Scriberia image of Singapore conference.