

## CODA: Visual Studies Now

GARY BRATCHFORD, JULIE PATARIN-JOSSEC, SUSAN HANSEN, JOHN GRADY and DEREK CONRAD MURRAY

In the last 20 years, the world and the way we see it have changed rapidly. The exponential growth of network-assisted visibility and the ways that images are created, used, stored, shared and deployed, as well as their migratory ability to move across borders, screens, and audiences (Zuev and Bratchford 2020, 3) attest to this. As the use, function, and presence of the visual changes, so too does the way it is examined and studied. The Visual Studies Journal Questionnaire and subsequent Roundtable placed this observation at the core of its enquiry. Inviting scholars from a host of disciplines, geographic regions, and institutions to speak to the theme *What is Visual Studies Today*, is, as Derek Conrad-Murray notes in the introductory address, neither to define any particular discipline or field, nor to make declarative statements about what a discipline or field should do or be. On the contrary, the intention of this critical project was to foster a conversation that foregrounds, and builds from, the complexities of interdisciplinary collaboration, its strengths and weaknesses, contributions and gaps. While the content of this volume can be analysed and debated, and used as a jumping-off point for new debates within the scholarly field of Visual Studies and its constituting (or competing) disciplines, the outcome of the Roundtable is one of many iterative and reciprocal steps towards better defining the aims, scope and remit of Visual Studies as a journal. By asking *What is Visual Studies Today*, we can better understand and delineate what role Visual Studies might have in the future, and what initiatives its Editorial board should further develop.

As the introduction of this issue outlines, *Visual Studies* (and its preceding titles) has kept in step with the scholarly debates of the time. Since its inception as '*Visual Studies*', the journal has rigorously engaged with the complexities of contemporary visuality while also recognising progressive shifts in cross-disciplinary ways to deal with the 'visual' in knowledge production and communication (Pauwels – this issue). To this end, *Visual Studies* has placed great emphasis on collaborative, interdisciplinary visual thinking in order to better approach and make sense of how we might apprehend the world, as well as the lacunas and blind spots that obfuscate our vision and analysis.

These 'blind spots' are, as the introduction notes, the void *Visual Studies* aims to fill, both as a discipline but also as a journal. To this end, *Visual Studies* welcomes submissions by scholars from within sociology as well as those in related fields, to consider and explore a broad range of visual material and reflect upon how such material can be studied in a trans- or interdisciplinary way. We are thus eager to encourage cooperation between scholars and practitioners from different disciplines, in developing and improving a shared understanding of how our methods and findings can be used for a more robust examination of the visual in social and cultural life.

The transdisciplinary character of the journal is reflected in its attention to visually-based research in sociology, anthropology, psychology and the social sciences generally; history; the visual and performing arts; the natural sciences; and graphic design and communication studies. Such initiatives could include but not be limited to visual enquiries of:

- Social and cultural organisation: The structure and consequences of belief systems, power relations, organisational imperatives, work and employment, family and other

domestic arrangements, housing opportunities and community relations, migration and ethnic identity, climate change, racial, cultural, economic and social inequality, stigma and humiliation, the welfare state, gender identities and society, space.

- Cultural and media communication: photography (history of), documentary and representational practices, documentary film, print analysis, non-fiction, and fictional cinema; advertising, social media and graphic design.
- Emerging global relationships and trends: Regional, national and local innovations and the political, social, cultural, aesthetic, and legal issues they raise in their production, dissemination and consumption, visual politics, political art and visual activism, conflict resolution, postcolonial analysis.
- Visual politics: Visual activism, the visual analysis of protests, occupations, insurgencies, conflicts and war. Conflict resolution, peace, health politics, international organisations, international relations. Cartographies, mapping, borders and contested spaces/zones.
- Techno-social visual studies: visualisations, artificial intelligence (AI), digital archives, remote sensing, drone produced imagery, visual and augmented reality (VAR), augmented reality, images and visuals in natural sciences, algorithms.
- Collaborative and participatory approaches: socially engaged and community practice, facilitation, participatory methods, explicitly multi-disciplinary practices.

Each one of the concerns listed above reflects contemporary issues and preoccupations we need to address. Not only may we have neglected others of equal significance, but also, we may not have anticipated emerging issues, and we realise that our goals are of necessity enriched by an expanding awareness. Our aim is to:

- Provide an international forum for the development of visual research.
- Provoke more acceptance, understanding and discussion of a wide range of methods, approaches, theories and paradigms that constitute image-based research.
- Enhance the development of visual research methodologies in all their various forms.
- Reduce the disparity in emphasis between visual and written studies in scholarly research.
- Encourage research that employs a mixture of visual methods, theoretical insights, and analytical approaches.
- Critically reflect on and contribute to the dialogue surrounding 'the visual' across the social sciences, humanities, and visual arts.
- Provide an arena for in-depth and creative exploration of various approaches, particular methods, theories and visual phenomena.
- Most articles published in the journal are accompanied by appropriate visual material, and the journal encourages visually-led submissions. The journal views Visual Studies as an expanding field and seeks to bridge the gap between empirically grounded visually-based research across the spectrum of the social sciences, arts, and humanities.

## REFERENCE

Zuev, Dennis, and Gary Bratchford. 2020. "Introduction: Visual Sociology and the Relational Image." In *Visual Sociology: Practices and Politics in Contested Spaces*, 3.