

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN SOCIOLOGY

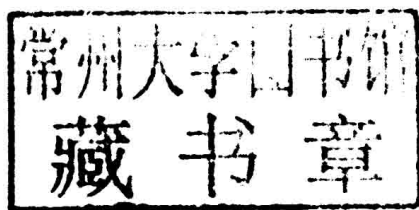
# Sociology of the Visual Sphere

Edited by  
Regev Nathansohn and Dennis Zuev



# Sociology of the Visual Sphere

Edited by Regev Nathansohn  
and Dennis Zuev



First published 2013  
by Routledge  
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4RN

First issued in paperback 2014

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group,  
an informa business*

© 2013 Taylor & Francis

The right of Regev Nathansohn and Dennis Zuev to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

**Trademark Notice:** Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Sociology of the visual sphere / edited by Regev Nathansohn and  
Dennis Zuev.

p. cm. — (Routledge advances in sociology ; 91)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Visual sociology. I. Nathansohn, Regev. II. Zuev, Dennis.

HM500.S63 2013

301—dc23

2012032647

ISBN 978-0-415-80700-5 (hbk)

ISBN 978-1-138-92077-4 (pbk)

ISBN 978-0-203-06665-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by IBT Global.

# Sociology of the Visual Sphere

This collection of original articles deals with two intertwined general questions: what is the visual sphere, and what are the means by which we can study it sociologically? These questions serve as the logic for dividing the book into two sections, the first ("Visualizing the Social, Sociologizing the Visual") focuses on the meanings of the visual sphere, and the second ("New Methodologies for Sociological Investigations of the Visual") explores various sociological research methods to getting a better understanding of the visual sphere. We approach the visual sphere sociologically because we regard it as one of the layers of the social world. It is where humans produce, use, and engage with the visual in their creation and interpretation of meanings. Under the two large inquiries into the "what" and the "how" of the sociology of the visual sphere, a subset of more focused questions is being posed: what social processes and hierarchies make up the visual sphere? How various domains of visual politics and visibility are being related (or being presented as such)? What are the relations between sites and sights in the visual research? What techniques help visual researcher to increase sensorial awareness of the research site? How do imaginaries of competing political agents interact in different global contexts and create unique, locally-specific visual spheres? What constitutes competing interpretations of visual signs? The dwelling on these questions brings here eleven scholars from eight countries to share their research experience from variety of contexts and sites, utilizing a range of sociological theories, from semiotics to post-structuralism.

**Dennis Zuev** is a Research Fellow in the Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-ISCTE-IUL) in Lisbon, Portugal.

**Regev Nathansohn** is the president (2010–2014) of the Visual Sociology Thematic Group working under the International Sociological Association, and a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, Ann-Arbor.

## Routledge Advances in Sociology

For a complete list of titles in this series, please visit [www.routledge.com](http://www.routledge.com)

- 61 Social Theory in Contemporary Asia**  
*Ann Brooks*
- 62 Foundations of Critical Media and Information Studies**  
*Christian Fuchs*
- 63 A Companion to Life Course Studies**  
The Social and Historical Context of the British Birth Cohort Studies  
*Michael Wadsworth and John Bynner*
- 64 Understanding Russianness**  
*Risto Alapuro, Arto Mustajoki and Pekka Pesonen*
- 65 Understanding Religious Ritual**  
Theoretical Approaches and Innovations  
*John Hoffmann*
- 66 Online Gaming in Context**  
The Social and Cultural Significance of Online Games  
*Garry Crawford, Victoria K. Gosling and Ben Light*
- 67 Contested Citizenship in East Asia**  
Developmental Politics, National unity, and Globalization  
*Kyung-Sup Chang and Bryan S. Turner*
- 68 Agency without Actors?**  
New Approaches to Collective Action  
*Edited by Jan-Hendrik Passoth, Birgit Peuker and Michael Schillmeier*
- 69 The Neighborhood in the Internet**  
Design Research Projects in Community Informatics  
*John M. Carroll*
- 70 Managing Overflow in Affluent Societies**  
*Edited by Barbara Czarniawska and Orvar Löfgren*
- 71 Refugee Women**  
Beyond Gender versus Culture  
*Leah Bassel*
- 72 Socioeconomic Outcomes of the Global Financial Crisis**  
Theoretical Discussion and Empirical Case Studies  
*Edited by Ulrike Schuerkens*
- 73 Migration in the 21st Century**  
Political Economy and Ethnography  
*Edited by Pauline Gardiner Barber and Winnie Lem*
- 74 Ulrich Beck**  
An Introduction to the Theory of Second Modernity and the Risk Society  
*Mads P. Sørensen and Allan Christiansen*

- 75 The International Recording Industries**  
*Edited by Lee Marshall*
- 76 Ethnographic Research in the Construction Industry**  
*Edited by Sarah Pink, Dylan Tutt and Andrew Dainty*
- 77 Routledge Companion to Contemporary Japanese Social Theory**  
From Individualization to Globalization in Japan Today  
*Edited by Anthony Elliott, Masataka Katagiri and Atsushi Sawai*
- 78 Immigrant Adaptation in Multi-Ethnic Societies**  
Canada, Taiwan, and the United States  
*Edited by Eric Fong, Lan-Hung Nora Chiang and Nancy Denton*
- 79 Cultural Capital, Identity, and Social Mobility**  
The Life Course of Working-Class University Graduates  
*Mick Matthys*
- 80 Speaking for Animals**  
Animal Autobiographical Writing  
*Edited by Margo DeMello*
- 81 Healthy Aging in Sociocultural Context**  
*Edited by Andrew E. Scharlach and Kazumi Hoshino*
- 82 Touring Poverty**  
*Bianca Freire-Medeiros*
- 83 Life Course Perspectives on Military Service**  
*Edited by Janet M. Wilmoth and Andrew S. London*
- 84 Innovation in Socio-Cultural Context**  
*Edited by Frane Adam and Hans Westlund*
- 85 Youth, Arts and Education**  
Reassembling Subjectivity through Affect  
*Anna Hickey-Moody*
- 86 The Capitalist Personality**  
Face-to-Face Sociality and Economic Change in the Post-Communist World  
*Christopher S. Swader*
- 87 The Culture of Enterprise in Neoliberalism**  
Specters of Entrepreneurship  
*Tomas Marttila*
- 88 Islamophobia in the West**  
Measuring and Explaining Individual Attitudes  
*Marc Helbling*
- 89 The Challenges of Being a Rural Gay Man**  
Coping with Stigma  
*Deborah Bray Preston and Anthony R. D'Augelli*
- 90 Global Justice Activism and Policy Reform in Europe**  
Understanding When Change Happens  
*Edited by Peter Utting, Mario Pianta and Anne Ellersiek*
- 91 Sociology of the Visual Sphere**  
*Edited by Regev Nathansohn and Dennis Zuev*

# Figures

3.1	Elections, Tess Scheffan, 2009.	31
3.2	Tel-Aviv Beach, Alex Levac, 2005.	32
3.3	Ariel Sharon, Micha Kirshner, 1983.	33
3.4	Tufah village, Pavel Wolberg (printed in Wolberg, 2006).	37
5.1	Daniela Comani, from the series "EINE GLÜCKLICHE EHE" (A HAPPY MARRIAGE): #2, 2003, © Daniela Comani.	65
5.2	Jenny Saville, "Passage" (2005), © Jenny Saville.	67
5.3	"Jake the Rapper," Gender Bender Festival catalogue (2007), © Harald Popp and Jake the Rapper.	71
5.4	Graffiti, Berlin, Friedrichshain, 2009, © Henning Onken.	73
6.1	Language used in YouTube videos about Uyghurs.	89
6.2	Clash of Chinese and Uyghur symbols in nationalist ideological code.	93
6.3	Map symbolism in nationalist (pan-Turkist) ideological code.	94
6.4	The iconic clash of Turkic and Chinese civilizations.	95
6.5	Images of purity and nature in human rights ideological code.	97
6.6	Militants from Islamic Party of East Turkestan issue a warning to the Chinese authorities.	98
7.1	Phatic signs of collective identity.	117
7.2	Expressive signs of collective identity.	120
7.3	Conative and poetic signs of collective identity.	122
8.1	Mental map overlapping with the geographical map extracted from GoogleEarth.	139
8.2	The interface of the Flash application that generates hybridization between the mental map and the geographical map showing the correspondences between the elements present in the two maps.	140
8.3	Top: research area and interviews' localization; bottom: photo elicitation set.	142

8.4	Top: mental map with high correspondence. Bottom: mental map with north and south completely reversed made by interviewee GR3-Int05-B.	147
8.5	The two sets of photos (A and B) used for the photo elicitation.	150
9.1	The Pylon and the Bank Account Monuments.	173
9.2	The Manhole Monument and Monumental Line.	174
9.3	The Tyre and Pyramid Monuments.	175



# Tables and Graphs

## TABLES

8.1	Photos' Recognition	144
8.2	Photos' Positioning on the Mental Map	144

## GRAPHS

8.1	Degree of correspondence and number of places marked on the mental maps.	148
-----	--	-----

# Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Tables and Graphs</i>	xi
1 Sociology of the Visual Sphere: Introduction	1
REGEV NATHANSOHN AND DENNIS ZUEV	

## PART I

### Visualizing the Social, Sociologizing the Visual

2 The Limits of the Visual in the “War without Witness”	13
PAVITHRA TANTRIGODA	
3 From a Slight Smile to Scathing Sarcasm: Shades of Humor in Israeli Photojournalism	25
AYELET KOHN	
4 Sociology of Iconoclasm: Distrust of Visuality in the Digital Age	42
ŁUKASZ ROGOWSKI	
5 Picturing “Gender”: Iconic Figuration, Popularization, and the Contestation of a Key Discourse in the New Europe	57
ANNA SCHÖBER	

## PART II

### New Methodologies for Sociological Investigations of the Visual

6 Production of Solidarities in YouTube: A Visual Study of Uyghur Nationalism	83
MATTEO VERGANI AND DENNIS ZUEV	

7	On the Visual Semiotics of Collective Identity in Urban Vernacular Spaces	108
	TIMOTHY SHORTELL AND JEROME KRASE	
8	Representing Perception: Integrating Photo Elicitation and Mental Maps in the Study of Urban Landscape	129
	VALENTINA ANZOISE AND CRISTIANO MUTTI	
9	Operations of Recognition: Seeing Urbanizing Landscapes with the Feet	160
	CHRISTIAN VON WISSEL	
	<i>Contributors</i>	183
	<i>Index</i>	187

# 1 Sociology of the Visual Sphere

## Introduction

*Regev Nathansohn and Dennis Zuev*

This collection of original articles deals with two intertwined general questions: what is the visual sphere, and what are the means by which we can study it sociologically?<sup>1</sup> These questions serve as the logic for dividing the book into two sections: the first (“Visualizing the Social, Sociologizing the Visual”) focuses on the meanings of the visual sphere, and the second (“New Methodologies for Sociological Investigations of the Visual”) explores various sociological research methods to getting a better understanding of the visual sphere. We approach the visual sphere sociologically because we regard it as one of the layers of the social world. It is where humans produce, use, and engage with the visual in their creation and interpretation of meanings.<sup>2</sup> Under the two large inquiries into the “what” and the “how” of the sociology of the visual sphere, a subset of more focused questions is being posed: What social processes and hierarchies make up the visual sphere? How are various domains of visual politics and visibility being related (or being presented as such)? What are the relations between sites and sights in the visual research? What techniques help visual researcher to increase sensorial awareness of the research site? How do imaginaries of competing political agents interact in different global contexts and create unique, locally specific visual spheres? What constitutes competing interpretations of visual signs? The dwelling on these questions brings here eleven scholars from eight countries to share their research experience from variety of contexts and sites, utilizing a range of sociological theories, from semiotics to post-structuralism.

This book joins a growing literature on visual sociology and anthropology.<sup>3</sup> In this introduction, it is our intention to highlight what we see as the contribution of this book to the larger body of scholarly literature on the topic. Ultimately, it is our intention here to “normalize” visual sociology as an integral component of sociological study. What this collection proposes is that the visual is everywhere, no matter where you “look.” Indeed, and much like every other field of sociological inquiry, there are unique characteristics also to the visuals. These are well expressed in every research context of the chapters in this book. However, these characteristics always—although to changing degrees—interact with other sociological

factors such as class, gender, ethno-racial power relations, and institutionalization, to name a few. This is the reason we suggest to normalize the visual within the sociological research.

Suggesting to normalize the visual within sociology does not assume that sociologists have yet discovered the visual. In fact, visibility and the visual sense has since long time been discussed as sociologically relevant and significant, for example, to our understanding of mobilities (Urry 2000) and of social existence (Sztompka 2008). Moreover, the theory of iconic consciousness, proposed by Jeffrey Alexander (see, e.g., Alexander 2010, Alexander et al. 2012), intends to recover the invisible strands of meaning in the aesthetic of mundane materiality of everyday life arguing that everyday experience is iconic.

However, despite what is widely conceived as the totality of the visual in the modern world, the verbal register in mainstream sociology still maintains its ascendancy over the visual one. Nevertheless, at the same time we are exposed to new communities of visual practices, such as social networking sites and YouTube, which emerge alongside the more classic social practices of visual interaction (and visual practices of social interaction). This constantly shifting field of enquiry requires continuous reflexivity and an ongoing development of research and observation tools.

The authors in this book all problematize different aspects of the visual sphere, from production and circulation of images, to their various framings by different actors for their individual and political purposes. In each of the chapters of this book there is an interplay between the general and the specific, where various theoretical and methodological aspects of the visual analysis are being contextualized in individual case studies. The conjunction of all researches shared here teaches us on the necessity to conceive the visual sphere as a multitude of relations between the images, their agency, and politics, whereby meanings are created and negotiated. The image, we learn, has an agency which extricates it from the confining status of a mere representation to-be-interpreted. It is also an active force directed both at the audience and at the producer, but also at institutions which are involved in circulating it. Overall, the chapters in this book establish the notion that the visual sphere—where images are produced, circulated, interpreted, reproduced, and re-imagined—is an active social force in both regulating human relationships as well as in subverting it. In the analysis of the visual sphere it is therefore paramount to put to scrutiny the location of the visual in the interactions between human agency and institutional constraints. The authors in this collection examine such interactions in various empirical settings, from urban landscapes to collective identities, and from modes of production of images to the means by which they become visible through various media.

Our main argument in this book, therefore, is that in order to better understand the social world we cannot overlook the visual sphere. The first part of the book teaches us both on what we can find in the visual sphere,

as well as what social mechanisms are at work in creating, maintaining, and subverting it. The second part exposes us to methodologies of learning and analyzing the visual data we collect and produce. In both parts of the book, although the authors highlight the visual aspects of social life, they also remind us—whether implicitly or explicitly—that the visual cannot stand alone in the desire to understand the social. Therefore, we wish to emphasize here how in some observations shared in this book the visual signifies other social mechanisms, whereas in other cases the visual is regarded as a trigger for social transformations.

The first part of the book opens with Tantrigoda's research (Chapter 2) which brings to the fore a discussion on the truth value of visual representations. Building on the case of media representations of the conflict between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Tantrigoda highlights the overarching assumption among the various actors in this conflict that there is a reality out there, but that this reality is also easy to be manipulated once subjected to visual representation by political actors. In the examples analyzed by Tantrigoda we see how in some cases the politics of representation and the controversy over the reliability of images can overshadow the discussion on the represented conflict to the degree that it becomes an integral part of the conflict itself.

Much like other social spheres, the visual sphere, therefore, should be understood in context, and it is our responsibility as critical viewers to learn as much as we can about the political conditions which enable specific mechanisms of production and dissemination of images in order to develop a careful reading of the visual.

The notion of "manipulation" is problematized in the following chapter, where Kohn (Chapter 3) focuses on how manipulations are in fact embedded within the modes of production of visual representations. Particularly, she shows us how a photographer's gaze can frame a certain situation to be seen in the photograph as a humorous scene. Analyzing photographs taken by Israeli photojournalists, Kohn focuses on the gap between the "reality" and its representations by means of creative intervention of the photographer who signals incongruousness in the scene. The absurdities such photographs present may then allow the viewers to develop critical observation and to rethink scenes they may be familiar with. This is how the act of production of the visual—by means of looking, framing, and presenting—may change the ways we look at our surrounding, interpret it, and react to it politically. This, however, could be achieved only when the photographer and the viewers share similar social conventions. According to Kohn, the perceived synchronicity of everything that is captured within the photographic frame precludes the common mechanism in humor—that of gradually arriving to the punch. Thus, to be successful it must be compensated by building on previous and shared knowledge of the photographer with the viewers. In her examination of the various gazes juxtaposed in some of the images—the gaze of the photographer, the

gaze of the photographed, and the gaze of the viewers—Kohn suggests, for example, that what she calls “the contemptuous gaze” can serve as another mechanism that not only compensates on the synchronic interpretation of the image but also opens the possibility for critical self-examination. This is the moment when an image may serve as a trigger for reexamination of other social elements, which—depending on other social factors—can lead to social transformations.

An examination of the relations between social transformations and the visual sphere is shared by Rogowski (Chapter 4), who analyzes contemporary formations of iconoclasm (*transformation iconoclasm*, *digital iconoclasm*, and *everyday iconoclasm*) and situates their practices within the history of distrust and destruction of visual images. Rogowski’s analysis suggests considering iconoclasm as a prism through which we can examine the changes of functioning of the visual sphere, the changing ontological status of the visual, and the changing relations between sites, sight, and other senses. Rogowski’s definition of certain contemporary digital manipulations of images as iconoclasm is a thought-provoking exercise which assumes that images still retain powers beyond their materiality and that destroying them can have an effect in the world. In a way, Rogowski’s analysis paints the visual sphere as a battlefield where images are both the targets and the means of achieving the targets.

While Rogowski invites us to think about digital iconoclasm as a contemporary image-based mechanism for intervention in the social sphere, Schober (Chapter 5) offers an analysis which shares similar assumptions with regards to the power of images in the social sphere, but offers different practices for achieving it. In the examples she analyzes, it is not iconoclasm that the social actors (visual artists, in her case) choose as their course of action, but the creative forms of visual innovations. Schober is particularly interested in the ways whereby the concept of “gender” appears in the public sphere, in the struggles around it, and in the options the visual sphere can offer in generating a social change. Schober investigates a variety of popular and artistic adoptions of concepts of gender in diverse European cultural contexts, and focuses on the visually based attempts to rearrange the public discourse from focusing on “women” to the problematization of gender. Images of gender, Schober argues, perform a double-edged role: on the one hand, they increase the public profile of gender; on the other, these images show how sociological concepts and interpretations can be put to crisis. The cases examined by Schober may lead to distrust mainstream visualizations of gender where the concept is presented as a seamless and non-conflicting reality. Such iconic images of gender may clash with the empirical reality of multiple gender configurations.

Schober thus shows how the visual sphere can serve as a platform for testing, exposing, and playing with new—and old—social concepts. It allows for the imagination to be public, to be displayed, and to be discussed and negotiated by means of verbal and visual languages. The visual sphere

can thus serve as a playground for ideas yet to be institutionalized. Once the image is being “freed” from the constraints of the social norms, she argues, what might seem familiar—such as concepts of masculinity, femininity, androgyny, sexuality, family, and genealogy—could be challenged and confronted with the much more chaotic experiences that the social order aspires to suppress.

What these approaches assume is that the visual is more than a medium. Indeed, it can serve as a medium for maintaining the normative social order, or for challenging it. The chapters in this section show that the visual is also an integral part of the wider social sphere, and has its own version of chaos and order. The visual is perceived as being more than a medium because it not only conveys messages; it also acts and is acted upon. But the visual is not alone, as the chapters in the second section of this collection show so well. While Schober discusses several visually-based attempts to change the way we think about “gender,” such a focus on the visual (how gender looks) hinders experiences related to other sensual or to non-sensual aspects of gender, which are not necessarily visual (or not always visual, or not in causal relations with the visual). Turning from the sociology of the visual sphere to the sociology of “visualism,” we may ask: if we assume that what is *material* is also visualizable, then what is the visual status of that which is *ideal*? In the examples that Schober discusses, we *see* that what is imagined *can* be visualized, and thus materialized. Therefore, it is possible to argue that visualizing the imagined (or idealized) must be materially mediated. This argument, however, is being further problematized in each of the chapters in this collection, with every doubt they expose (e.g., in the debate over the veracity of images in Tantrigoda’s chapter), and with every gap they point at (such as the temporal gap between a political revolution and the following iconoclastic events described in Rogowski’s chapter, or the gap between people’s perceptions of their environment and the maps they draw, as described in Anzoise and Mutti’s chapter). Instead of offering a solution to the paradoxical position of the visual within the matrixes of the material/ideal and imagined/real, what the *sociology* of the visual sphere can offer is an elaboration on the human creative experiences in acting with and against the visual not only despite these paradoxes but also by utilizing them.

Some of the means by which such sociological investigation can be carried out are exemplified in the second part of the book, where the authors discuss contemporary research methods ranging from analysis based on photos taken by the researchers (and elaborating on how to take them, and how to store and organize them), through analyzing visuals (photographs, drawings, video clips) created by the research subjects, to analyzing the interaction with and interpretations of the visual world which surrounds us.

The second section opens with Vergani and Zuev’s research (Chapter 6) which offers tools for visual analysis in the Web 2.0 age, thereby defining YouTube as a social space. They show how a study on Uyghur nationalism



can benefit enormously from analyzing the various aspects of YouTube clips on the topic: the content and form of the clips; their modes and contexts of production, circulation, and reception; and the interactions between the clips' viewers and the network of YouTube users. Their chapter thus presents an innovative inquiry into current day's means by which political mobilization is taking place in a context of ethno-national conflict. Like other contributors to this book, Vergani and Zuev also show how the visual cannot stand alone. Thus, besides exploring the various ramifications of the topic under investigations (in their case, the technical means of producing YouTube videos and the competing ideological codes expressed in them, to name a few), they also show how these could be integrated with other elements related to the topic (such as the linguistic aspects of the YouTube videos). Additionally, and much like Anzoin and Mutti (Chapter 8), they also offer a mixed methods approach and demonstrate how quantitative and qualitative analyses feed one another and contribute to the fine tuning of the research protocol, as well as to the crystallization of the main sociological argument. It is this research method that leads them, for example, to uncover the optimism of Uyghur nationalists to engender change and internationalize the conflict between Han Chinese and Uyghurs via YouTube.

Shortell and Krase (Chapter 7) also utilize the Internet, although for a different purpose. Throughout the recent years they have created an online public visual database which contains thousands of images available for everyone to explore and analyze. This database contains images Shortell and Krase keep producing for their study of glocalization in urban settings. Based on these researcher-produced images, Shortell and Krase study the various visual expressions of glocalization. Traveling between several global cities throughout the world (sometimes visiting the same city more than once) they took thousands of pictures of urban neighborhoods that serve as their raw data to be analyzed. In their contribution for this book they share part of their larger project, and focus on images they took in seven global cities. To show how urban vernacular neighborhoods in these cities change as a result of globalization they extend Jakobson's semiotics to be useful for an analysis of visual signs in the urban setting and couple it with symbolic interactionism. Both of these methods are being used here under the framework of the grounded theory, which allows them to reveal the manner in which local groups and individuals assert agency in a multitude of ways and intervene in the vernacular space by performing visible signs of their collective identity. These signs, once documented by visual researchers, create what Shortell and Krase call "the photographic survey," which allows researchers to conduct various kinds of analyses to enrich our knowledge of the social sphere.

Much like Vergani and Zuev, Shortell and Krase suggest paying close attention to visual signs which they perceive as being at the heart of social interaction to the degree that human intersubjective experience is dependent upon them. Focusing on photographs as a source for rich visual data