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Special Topic: Challenging Sociology Visually

Guest Editor: John Grady: Sociology's New Workshop: The Visual Challenge to Sociology

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Becoming a Visual Sociologist

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ABSTRACT

The classroom provides a very useful site for developing the skills and sensibilities of visual sociology. This paper outlines a step by step process by which the visual novice can begin to introduce the analysis of visual materials into the classroom and, in the bargain, become more accomplished in creating and interpreting images for research purposes. The "cash value" – as William James would say – of following such a program would not only be a more vigorous, exhilarating, and insightful sociology, but also an academy full of more versatile, and happier, sociologists.

During the last decade interest in visual sociology has been growing. Diana Papademas has edited *Visual Sociology and Using Film/ Video in Sociology Courses* (1993); Doug Harper (1994, 2000) has written a review article for Denzin and Lincoln's *The Handbook of Qualitative Research;* the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA) now has over 300 members and just under 60 papers, videos, slide-shows and computer presentations are delivered at each annual conference. Also, Doug Harper has transformed *Visual Sociology*, the journal of the IVSA, from an offset printed newsletter into a peer-reviewed bi-annual journal that meets art magazine standards for photographic reproduction and design. By now, a careful library and on-line search would yield hundreds and hundreds of articles, monographs and visual essays that could be used to construct a curriculum or flesh out a syllabus. This material includes edited volumes like Jon Wagner's *Images of Information* (1979) and, more recently, Jon Prosser's *Image-based Research* (1998). Some of these works, like John and Malcolm Collier's *Visual Anthropology* (1984) — the closest thing to a textbook in the field — and Doug Harper's *Working Knowledge* (1987), arguably have become classics in contemporary social science. In spite of all this activity, however, there is little evidence that other sociologists are integrating these materials into their teaching and research.

For visual sociology to be thus marginalized is unfortunate because working with images has much to offer the field of sociology as a whole. First, visual media and messages increasingly dominate mass communications in contemporary society. Not to study how these messages are produced, what they encode, and how they are consumed ignores an important phenomenon that contains a rich source of easily available information.

Second, the image is a unique form of data. It is, on the one hand, tangibly objective. What you see is what the camera got and so, everything else being equal, the image is a physical record of something that either was, or happened, at some time or other.[1] On the other hand, the image is irreducibly subjective. It invariably reflects the focus of attention at a particular moment of the one holding or directing the camera. The image quite often also captures important aspects of the experience of the subject of the image. This is especially true with film and video. Put summarily and simply, images can represent complex subjective processes in an extraordinarily objective form. For a great many questions and arguments, then, images provide the most valid data possible. Learning how to manage and interpret images, therefore, is an ideal way to learn about data in general and to introduce students to the craft of sociology.

Third, thinking, writing and talking about and with, images not only can make arguments more vivid, but also more lucid. Quantitative sociologists have long known that the clearest way of organizing material is to lay tables and charts out in a sequence and then write an account that explains what is in each one, beginning with the first and ending with the last. The same applies to maps, photographs and film clips.

Finally, documentary production – whether with still or moving images – is a means of communication that can be easily modified to treat sociological subjects in a sociological fashion. There is simply no reason, therefore, why sociologists shouldn't be producing path-breaking work in this genre. But if visual sociology has so much to offer, then why hasn't there been more of a rush to include the production and analysis of visual materials into research and teaching?

While there are many reasons for a reluctance to work with images, I believe that currently the most important obstacle is a form of shyness. Sociologists who are interested in incorporating visual materials into their work but have never used a camera or are unfamiliar with the conventions and sensibilities of art history and film criticism are like wallflowers. The more they want to get out on the floor, the more they are paralyzed by, well, performance anxiety. The purpose of this essay, therefore, is an insistent, and I hope irresistible, invitation to join the dance. It is motivated by the belief that it is a lot easier to get on the floor than most people think and that, once there, it's

[1] "Everything else being equal" is, of course, never the case. The image is always a representation that is mediated by the camera holder, the condition and capacity of the medium and equipment, conditions (natural, social and personal) at the time of the shooting, the response of the subject to those conditions, and how the image is made visible and prepared for display. There is also much room for mischief at each phase of the process. The distortions and misinterpretations that most concern social scientists usually involve taking a photograph out of context, or not bothering to understand the context of the photo opportunity in the first place. More technical distortions can often be identified "internally," by an informed critique of the photograph itself. Most questions concerning the adequacy of a representation can be resolved with a little elbow grease in the form of scholarly attention and technical skill. It is important to note, however, that the reason there is such concern about distortion is because of the power of the image. This power is rooted in its capacity to represent something other than itself on something that is experienced as close to that other's own terms.

just a matter of taking one step at a time. The following guidelines should provide the novice with a manageable itinerary to developing skill in the art of visual sociology both in the classroom and in the conduct of research.

I have organized this paper into four major topics. The first emphasizes how narrow the gap is between traditional modes of sociological analysis and working with visual materials. The second points out that learning how to produce and evaluate visual materials is a form of craft knowledge that the sociologist can learn on the job and, most importantly, in the classroom. The third argues that visual sociology is only a "more visual sociology" (Chaplin 1994) and shows how existing courses can be transformed in small steps. Finally, the fourth topic explores ways of creating a more supportive milieu for working with visual materials in your department and institution. Each topic is divided into three separate sections that are numbered sequentially. Thus, the argument as a whole will be made in the form of twelve propositions.

1. Images Must Be Treated as Data and not as an Instructional Aid.

Visual sociology integrates the analysis and production of visual representation into the disciplined study of social relations. At its core is the "image," which, for all intents and purposes, is no more than a picture, however manufactured, of something that has human significance. Generally most images — beginning with Lascaux through yesterday's Polaroid snapshot — represent some person, object, place or event in the image-maker's psychic landscape. Thus, whatever else they may be – ideology, personal statement, or even an accident – images can always constitute data for one set of purposes or another.

All images have complex histories. Somebody, some group, or social network produces them with a given technology under varying conditions for different purposes. In addition, all images are often consumed by other groups of people who may have a completely different set of interests and expectations. As a rule, the more that we can learn about how specific images have been made and used, the more informed will be our understanding of the many meanings that an image can sustain. What this means is that images are forms of data that require the same kind of care in their production and interpretation that surveys, interviews, ethnographic observations, and archival records do. It is important, therefore, for the novice visual sociologist to appreciate that the skills and techniques used to produce and interpret the kinds of data that are more familiar to social scientists and humanists can, and must, be transferred to the study of images. Once we know what they were made and used for, we have a handle on defining what they could be data for. At that point, we can begin to do what we always do with data: sample, count, and compare; always being ready, of course, to modify our techniques to whatever kinds of information we determine might be able to be extracted from the images themselves.

What makes pictures so valuable in human communication is that they encode an enormous amount of information in a single display or representation. This information

Figure 1. *Between 1968 and 1972, Bill Owens in* **Suburbia***(1973) photographed people and events in three suburban communities in the Livermore Amador Valley in northern California. The photographs and accompanying text is a remarkable portrait of an unremarkable, yet fascinating, way of life: middle-class America.*

is framed contextually in space and time on a flat surface and so all the bits of information produce, in combination with each other, a synergistic effect that generates even more information. It is, therefore, an inevitable by-product of the material properties of an image that makes it possible for any one picture to contain many meanings and sustain multiple interpretations. In a sense, images cry out to us to imbue them with meaning and it is this, above all, which provides them with their unique capacity to engage us.

Unfortunately, because images can so completely capture our attention, instructors often will only use them for illustrative purposes: to make an argument come alive so that it will be firmly imprinted on students' minds. Images used in this way function as little more than a highlighter, vividly enhancing those points in the text that the instructor wants to underscore. But, like a highlighter, using images in this way may push from consciousness those parts of the text that have not been illuminated.

Illustrating an argument, therefore, is just what an instructor should not do because it devalues the very thing that makes the image important as data, which is the simultaneity of the relations that exist between the various elements represented in the

Figure 2. Another view of the suburban barbecue. Why are we so certain that this photograph is upside down while the one in figure 1 is right side up? Is it not possible that the camera was positioned so that this is the view that the photographer intended to take? What cognitive assumptions -- and perceptual patterns -- do we rely upon to orient ourselves to this scene? What relationship do they have to the social constructs we use to regulate our everyday lives? Just how much of our world is socially constructed anyway?

frame. It is the fact that it is information that is contained in the image, which ultimately accounts for its power to engage us. And while the emotional response to that power may be compelling it is, at best, an unsure guide to identifying that, which makes the information significant.

Figure 1 depicts a ceremonial occasion in American suburban life: a neighborhood barbecue. Tables have been set up, grills lit, swing-sets pulled from the backyards, and people are socializing in small groups in a residential cul-de-sac. A focus on this social event provides data that should be considered in a discussion of the public life of suburban communities. Such a discussion would undoubtedly mirror what has caught the attention of the photographer; restrict itself to what is depicted in the foreground and, thus, probably not consider the material infrastructure that provides a staging ground for the drama we are witnessing. Nevertheless, while it may be unnecessary to consider the nature and quality of the housing stock, the automobiles and their garages, and the absence of pedestrian traffic on the sidewalks in a study of neighborhood

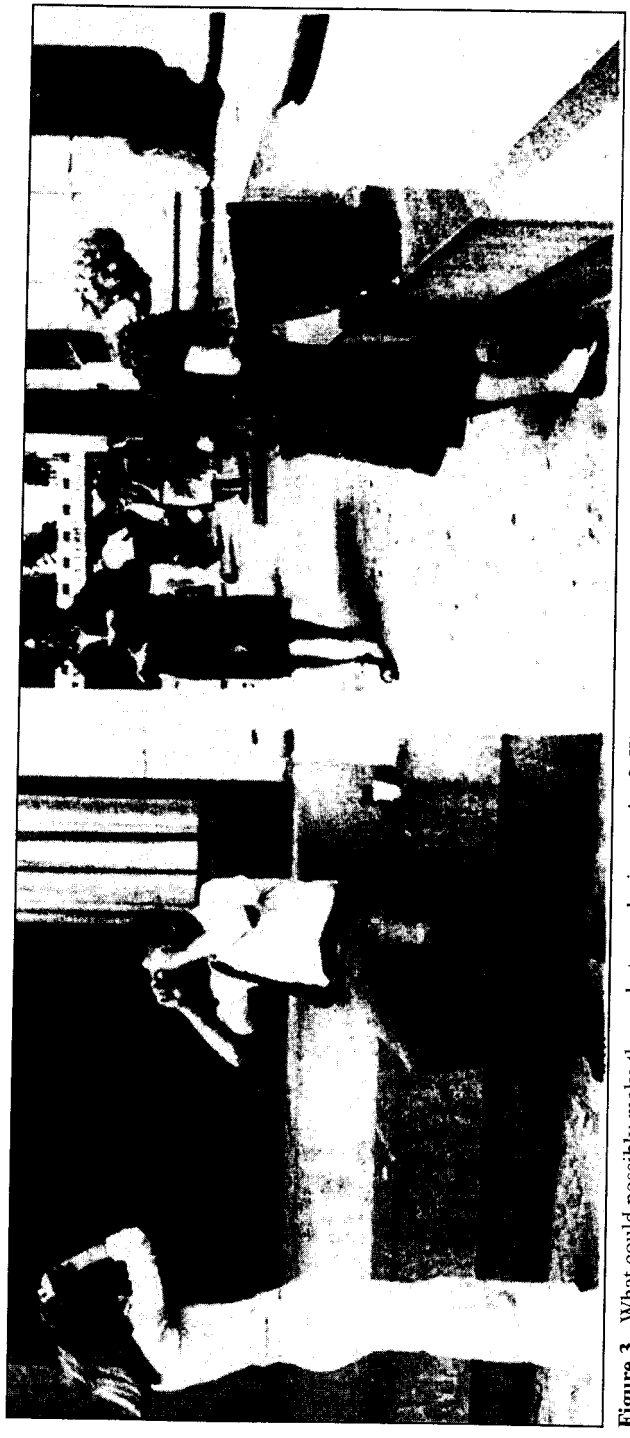

Figure 3. What could possibly make these photographs interesting? Well, to a social scientist like William H. Whyte in **The City: Rediscovering the Center** (1988), who is concerned with what makes an urban environment user-friendly, these photographs show some of the purposes that a well-placed ledge can serve. Ledges, in combination with wide sidewalks, adequate sun-light, interesting window displays, vendors and the like all play a far more important role in making a city a habitat for vital communities than many urban planners ever imagined. Some things, however, these photos cannot tell us. Has the woman in white asked a passerby to take a snapshot; was he sitting there first; or, did the encounter proceed the photograph? Is the woman inspecting her package using the ledge because it is a convenient height or because it conceals the contents of the bag from passersby? The answers to these questions might tell us about how we close or open ourselves to others in a community of strangers (Lofland, 1998), but for that we would need more data and, of course, more pictures.

sociability, the trained sociologist should still notice all this. These elements of the image might become, for example, useful variables in a comparison between suburban barbecues and urban block parties and festivals.

Like an interviewer's transcript or an ethnographer's field notes, the photograph is a record of that to which attention has been paid. But the photograph also includes extraneous material that, because it is an actual part of the fabric of its subjects' lives at the moment of record, might turn out not to be so extraneous the more that world is studied. A dramatic example of how much more information is embedded in the image than we might think is found by contrasting Figure 1 and Figure 2.

When students in the classroom are asked to make an inventory of what they see in Figure 1, they mostly make lists of the people and things that are visible in the foreground of the photograph. When they are requested to do the same for Figure 2, they first identify the horizon line and the shadows that are cast by various objects, which they never mention when viewing Figure 1. In other words, they notice what Gibson (1982) calls the ecological properties of the "ambient array," or the visually experienced world: mostly shapes, textures and different intensities of reflected light. This information was in the image all along, of course, but it is so taken for granted that it only becomes evident when we display the inverted image.

Used in the traditional manner of the audio-visual aid, the display of images in the classroom well deserves the disdain it often receives from serious academics. Mere illustration simplifies complex subjects, trivializes events and issues, and may induce a cognitive passivity that precludes the exercise of analytic reason. But used as a source of data — which must be assessed judiciously, examined carefully, and interpreted thoroughly — images provide a kind of material that encourages analysis, especially in conjunction with data from other sources and, of course, texts that work through the data. So, the first, and most important, step to becoming a visual sociologist is to realize that images are, above all else, data and should only be used as such in the classroom.

2. Images Must Be Viewed Seriously

Establishing a professional tone in the viewing of images is easier said than done. One of the legacies of the audio/visual tradition of illustration is that students come into our classes expecting either to be amused or to be edified by the images we display. Their experience is that viewing is a break in the action that enlivens the pace of normal instruction. So as soon as the projector and screen are set up or the monitor turned on, students know that it will be time either to relax or to view something so serious that its interpretation of events and society will be beyond question. Steven Speilberg's films about the slave trade (*Amistad*) and the Holocaust (*Schindler's List*), for example, are often shown to junior high and high school students to elicit an emotional response that makes the students amenable to a moral instruction they might otherwise resist.

In addition, because students know that teachers will expect them to discuss what they have seen, they have developed very effective ways of deflecting the kind of

personal scrutiny by both their teachers and their peers (and especially the latter) to which a too candid response might expose them. The effect of these practices and conventions is that joking and the solemn expression of outrage are two of the common responses that undermine taking images seriously as data. What is particularly insidious about both humor and the judgmentalism that usually flows from pious rage is that they tend to reduce all discussion of the image to a familiar and unthreatening script. Unchecked these responses can easily "blinker" a class and dissipate the kind of attention that is necessary to analyze images fruitfully.

One rule of thumb in dealing with inappropriate humor and knee-jerk outrage is to flush them out into the open and then, if necessary, neutralize their negative impacts by a conscious attempt at sublimation. This can be accomplished by deliberately eliciting personal responses with the understanding that, within the bounds of propriety, any response will be acceptable so long as the student is prepared to expand on why they might feel the way that they do. If no response is forthcoming and yet the teacher believes that something is being suppressed you may find it useful to probe: "You seemed to be smiling, what was it that struck you as funny or odd?" Write the responses down on the board. After a few minutes of this, tell the students that it is time to move on and to understand in a more focused way what else can be seen in the image. Advise the students that they should keep their responses in mind and suggest others but that an adequate analysis requires a more dispassionate and reasoned inquiry. In fact, the rationale for viewing and analyzing images in a professional manner should be made explicit and distributed to the class as a preliminary to the first round of viewing images. It should be possible to establish a professional tone for discussing images within the first several weeks of the class although the class may need to be explicitly reminded of the importance of looking at visual materials more maturely during this period.

One of the most effective ways of encouraging students to take images seriously is to integrate their viewing into the class on a regular basis. It is not very difficult to insert brief periods of fifteen to twenty minutes in duration for viewing and discussion into a class. It is important, however, that the images either document or challenge arguments in the text or lecture. It is this dramatic context that makes it possible to identify them as data.

Sociology is often defined as a field that studies the deeper and wider significance of what, to the uninitiated, might appear to be mundane or banal. One way of helping students develop a sociological imagination about everyday things that they might otherwise take for granted is to show them how photographs and video clips of these everyday things are rich repositories of information that can be used in theory and analysis. If Bill Whyte can find much to talk about in photographs of building ledges on a busy city street (Cf. Figure 3), just imagine what you and your students could discover with different concerns in your own surroundings. Once a pattern is established of finding extraordinary things in the ordinary, it then is much easier to convince students that the really interesting thing about viewing exotic images is to identify the more general social processes they represent.

Figure 4. These three pairs of photographs are taken from the 1937, 1967, and 1997 yearbooks of a woman's college that became co-educational in 1988. Can you tell which pairs are taken from which years? What continuities and changes can you notice in how young women are represented in these images?

Finally, the more that viewing images adequately and professionally is rewarded, the more that students will come to value the exercise. It is very useful, therefore, to integrate the careful analysis of images into the course's grading system. Brief exercises where students analyze the social content of a few images can be conducted as in-class quizzes or as short take home essays. Four or five of these, if each were worth 5% of their final grade, could easily be integrated into most courses.

Creating a serious tone in the study of images is well worth the effort. First, possibilities for collaborative learning are significantly enhanced because displaying the image in a very public forum permits a collective viewing that encourages dialogue and debate. Second, it is also important to realize that the more that visual materials are explored in the classroom, or as assigned research topics, the more possible it will be to devise interesting assignments and research projects as course requirements. Students who are either more motivated or better prepared tend to thoroughly enjoy working on these projects and can thus become enthusiastic research assistants in more ambitious projects.

3. Always Think Sociologically

There is much that we sociologists can learn about the uses of imagery from other disciplines. Art history, anthropology, psychology, and marketing studies have long analyzed images as sources of information about human behavior. In fact, one of the most exciting things about becoming a visual sociologist is that it gives you a reason to explore their findings and insights. Nevertheless, there are at least four ways in which sociology is invaluable in visual inquiry. These include defining questions, operationalizing variables, developing methodology and providing insight.

A. Defining Questions.

Imagine that you are idly thumbing through a college yearbook, looking at a compilation of images that are as banal as they are prolific. These include photographs of each member of the graduating class, pictures of various categories of formally defined events, as well as a series of ostensibly "candid" shots which usually focus on students' leisure time activities and sometimes hint at mildly illicit pursuits. Consider what you might see displayed in many of these shots. How are the graduates represented: close-ups or full-body shots; with an indeterminately generic background or posed somewhere around the campus; are they smiling or not? What kinds of events are displayed? Who is in the shot and what are they doing? How are students' rooms decorated and with what? How are students shown using their rooms and so on?

A college yearbook is actually an idealized representation of a complex, yet bounded, social world that, when examined carefully, reveals much about what those who put the book together value. In addition, because only just so much can be contrived, yearbooks are also catalogues of that world's mores. Students wear wristwatches, have certain kinds of hair-dos, are clothed in certain styles, and either have or don't have members of

Figure 5. The picture on the left is taken from Erving *Goffman's Gender* Adverstisements while the one on the right is from the October 1998 issue of *Vanity Fair*. Goffman tells us that "Women more than men, it seems, are pictured engaged in involvements which remove them psychologically from the social situation at large, leaving them unoriented in it and to it, and presumably, therefore, dependent on the protectiveness and goodwill of others who are (or might come to be) present..."

"Just as covering the mouth with the hand can be attenuation of covering the face, so a finger brought to the mouth can be an attenuation of sucking or biting the finger. The impression is given that somehow a stream of anxiety, rumination or whatever, has been split off from the main source of attention and is being sustained in a dissociated, unthinking fashion." (Goffman, 1979: 57-60).

The photograph of the male biting his thumb is separated by at least twenty years from the photograph of the woman selected by Goffman and had lead Richard Gubitosi (1998) to conclude that: "This advertisement modifies Goffman's thesis because the subject here is a male performing a ritualization of licensed withdrawal commonly associated with women. The subject is biting his thumb and hiding part of his face in the process. His lowered eyes and gesture imply that his mind has wandered. Perhaps he is thinking, or, more accurately, disappointed or anxious. Either way, a male subject has adopted a more female ritualization."

Gubitosi's fellow student, Jamie Gomarlo, seriously questions his interpretation of the image. "The man in this image is biting his thumb, but he has a completely different look on his face than women in similar poses... (T)he man in this advertisement is deep in thought and completely in the moment. This advertisement is in complete agreement with Goffman's rules of the roles that men and women are portrayed as having in advertisements (Gomarlo, 1998)."

What would your students think?

the opposite sex in their rooms. They may display some items on their walls and on their desks, and not others. And much of this can be detected in the photos with, or without, a magnifying glass.

For sociologists who are interested in social and cultural patterns and change, therefore, the visual images in something as mundane as a college catalogue can provoke a myriad of questions (Cf. Figure 4). Some of these may be comparative and historical. To this day colleges in America vary in their social composition — whether ethnic, racial, religious, class or region — and institutional identity. Furthermore, college yearbooks have been produced since the turn of the century if not before, so they document changes over time. Other questions may be suggested by anomalies visible in the images. Why do some students appear to decorate their rooms differently than other students? Is it because they are first year students and not upperclassmen? What about day students who often remain in the rooms they have occupied since early childhood and who live in the same household as their parents? We never see their rooms in the yearbooks. These questions can be explored differently, in the present and ethnographically, with camera in hand.

But why should we bother? Because as sociologists we're interested in things like the life cycle and identity formation, occupational cultures, the quality of gender relationships, the lived significance of symbolic forms, and the like. With the kinds of questions we routinely entertain, we should be able to find fascinating, useful and important information even in seed catalogues. Imagine how much information can be extracted from, and produced by, visual representations of social worlds full of people and their products. In other words, just about any question for which an observation might provide an answer can be elicited from a visual image.

B. Operationalizing Variables

All questions entail either a hypothesis or suspicion about the nature of the relationship between one thing and another. All answers usually take the form of stories that purport to tell us what that relationship may be. As sociologists we are seldom surprised to find out that most human stories concern loss or gain and that certain factors affect how likely it is that, in any given situation, we will experience one outcome rather than another. Gender, race, class, age, size, strength, beauty, birth order, group cohesion and so on are all variables that we use both in interpreting behavior and in explaining how lives are organized the way they are. What's more, social distance can be measured, norms of deference identified, settings categorized, and all of these can be correlated with certain mores as opposed to others.

Never be surprised at how much sociological knowledge can illuminate an image. The same is true of the images that you create with a camera. Experienced interviewers who begin to work with video, for example, will find themselves noticing layers of meaning in an interview that a journalist or filmmaker often will overlook. More

importantly, what is noticed often suggests other factors or issues that should be explored.

One of the most insightful examples of what a good sociologist can do with visual imagery is demonstrated in Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979). This book is probably the single most important sociological contribution to the study of advertising. It is also one of the most penetrating examinations of the ways in which gender expectations shape how we live in our bodies. Goffman argues that advertising as well as vernacular photography should best be seen as "idealizations" of conduct. While it is unclear just how closely people approximate these idealizations in everyday life, they certainly would like to. So, the fact that these poses are exaggerated does not mean that they are unrelated to what we do. Rather, they serve as models, prototypes, for what we are trying to become. In this context, Goffman points out the significance of what he calls "the feminine touch," which refers to a tendency to depict women holding their hands in a way that accentuates an insufficiency for decisive action. This is particularly noteworthy when women are displayed with men. In addition, Goffman noticed a tendency for women to be displayed in a way that suggested that they are "away," or not consciously connected with the action in the scene where they are depicted. He named this variable "licensed withdrawal" and suggested that it is an immensely costly privilege that women are afforded by protective males who are, of course, invariably displayed far more alertly, hands ready for action. I have talked about *Gender Advertisements* at some length because Goffman models in an exemplary fashion what a good sociologist can find in the visual image.

If anything characterizes the sociological approach to research it has been its attention to methodology, to devising ways of collecting reliable and valid information. At its simplest, sociological method should be envisioned as a three-stage process: defining a universe of meaning, sampling that universe, and coding the data.

Perhaps you or your students wonder whether the rules of gender representation that Goffman has identified in Gender Advertisements are historically specific (Cf. Figure 5). Maybe, with continued changes in women's roles and consciousness, these rules have changed in the 20 years since his book was published. Perhaps men and women were different in the distant past? Either is a testable proposition. The first step would be to define the kinds of venues to be examined. Magazines? If so, what kind? Those aimed at homemakers? Young women? High fashion? Mass circulation family magazines like Life or Look? Various kinds of men's magazines? Perhaps newspapers, illustrated books, catalogues or posters might be more appropriate? The crucial issue in defining an appropriate universe of meaning, in this case, would be to determine what markets these venues exploited. In the absence of a particular research imperative, a cross section of those magazines with the widest circulation will usually do.

The second step is to extract a representative sample of the images contained in the selected magazines. The easiest way to do this is to establish parameters. Thirty, fifteen or ten images from one, two or three specific issues a year, chosen at ten-year intervals

would provide a sample of 300 images covering one magazine over the course of a century. Random sampling of an issue's images can be restricted to images of a certain size — larger images provide more space for thematic embellishment — or other specifications required by your hypothesis. After counting the total number of acceptable images in any given issue; it is merely a question of using an appropriate sampling technique to select the images for the sample. A table of random numbers like those that are included in most research methods textbooks (Cf. E.g. Babbie 1992: Appendix D; Bernard 1995: Appendix A) might prove useful. The number of images sampled, of course, depends upon the number of variables being tested.

Sampling, of course, is also important in case studies as Howard Becker so ably establishes in *Tricks of the Trade* (1997: 85-88). Videographed interviews for a documentary about a certain event must encompass all of the major social roles that contributed to the event: not just union leaders and managers in a strike, but also rank and filers, non-union members, foremen, the wider community, and so on. The concept of a shooting script, first developed by Roy Striker in collaboration with Robert Lynd as a guide for the FSA photographers during the Great Depression, also constitutes a kind of sampling procedure. It served as an inventory of basic shots that a photographer needed to take in order to establish a context for whatever is chosen as a focus (Suchar 1997: 36).

The third methodological step is coding the data. Usually, it is advisable to develop a coding sheet in advance of the sampling process, but there is nothing to stop the investigator from adding or modifying categories during the process of research. Goffman provides the reader with some explicit advice on what should be considered in coding rules of gender representation. Nevertheless, he tells us little about other things that might concern a student interested in gender issues like, for instance, variations in the kinds of activities men and women are depicted doing, or the settings they occupy, and whether they are "eroticized" or not. The key in coding images is to identify just what the presence or the absence of some element in an image may indicate. Length of hair and hem may be significant variables in one investigation, but not in another. The strength of any research project depends on the significance of what is coded and how well the actual coding can be replicated.

If, for example, there is concern that the image of women is being increasingly eroticized as most contemporary feminist criticism suggests, then "nudity" should be a good indicator of the erotic. But what constitutes nudity? In contemporary Western culture we should begin with any unclothed display of primary and secondary sex characteristics. These would include genitals, buttocks and breasts. But what about a photograph of a woman taken from the waist up who is unclothed, yet facing away from the camera so that her breasts are not visible? I would argue that this is a "nude" shot because we can easily imagine what should be on the other side. It would follow, therefore, that my criteria for coding "nudity" should include *no evidence of clothed primary or secondary sexual characteristics*. While others might argue with this coding

instruction, they certainly should be able to replicate it and arrive at comparable findings.

D. Providing Insight

Our sociological training also provides us with rich resources for interpreting images. Not only is the history of sociological theory a repository of illuminating insights, but that quality of mind we prize and try and develop in our students, the sociological imagination, is, at its simplest, an alert consciousness poised for insight. As Everett Hughes has said:

> The essence of the sociological imagination is free association, guided but not hampered by a frame of reference internalized not quite into the unconscious. It must work even in one's dreams but be where it can be called up at will. When people say of my work, as they often do, that it shows insight, I cannot think what they could mean other than whatever quality may have been produced by intensity of observation and a turning of the wheels to find a new combination of the old concepts, or even a new concept (Hughes 1971: vi).

Appropriately enough, the volume in which Hughes made this remark is entitled *The Sociological Eye*. Hughes is not alone in using visual imagery to stand for the interpretative moment in sociological analysis. Sociologists commonly "see," "observe," "illuminate," "view," "display," "uncover," patterns, processes and structures. Sight, more than any of the other senses, puts the thing perceived in the context of its environment. Sight, therefore, situates its objects much as analysis seeks to do with propositions. It shouldn't surprise us, then, that the image invites insight. Why are those people close together, while those are apart? Why are some people smiling and others not? How are the people in the frame related? What roles do they play in the event that has been photographed? Trained sociologists will find themselves brimming with ideas that might help explain what is going on in an image.

It is also possible to create, or search for, images with sociological concepts in mind. For example, it is well known that areas of racial and ethnic transition are often flash points of conflict between different groups. Yet, interviewers often find that people in these areas may accentuate the positive aspects of relationships and stress instances of civility, neighborliness and the like in their responses. Various photographic research strategies could provide a richer and more complex picture of the situation they describe. One approach could be to take photographs of specific public places at significant time intervals. Public streets, parks, or coffee shops are all places where people go about their business and as a matter of course do things together with other people. The photographs should reveal just who those others may be and something of the quality of the exchanges. Another approach would be to take pictures of various

kinds of thoroughfares and access points in the neighborhood, like sidewalks, yards, doorways, windows, and so on. Are they inviting, or do they warn the stranger off. Fences, locks, "no loitering; police take notice" signs, "neighborhood crime watch" stickers and bars on windows are all measures of social control whose incidence can be compared with that in more stable or homogeneous neighborhoods. The photographs not only constitute data in themselves but can be used in conjunction with interviews to elicit testimony about the neighborhood that residents otherwise might not talk about easily.

Hughes continues his aforementioned remarks by saying:

> I think I even do my reading by free association: 'Didn't Simmel, or Durkheim, Weber, Mead or Marshall, or someone say something on that point?' I do a great deal of my reading by starting with the index (Ibid.).

The visual sociologist does the same thing with images. Something in the picture, or something glanced at in passing that could be pictured, will suggest an idea or hint at a link to a theory. It is from such moments that insight is born and from such insights that full-blown interpretative and research strategies can be constructed.

It is also important to note that other kinds of visual narratives can be similarly mined for insight. Theda Scokpol tells us that:

> ... I learned a lot from the hundreds of political cartoons that I collected during the health reform debate... To make people laugh, cartoonists have to capture social truths – and pinpoint political ironies. So cartoons are an excellent source for a scholar trying to understand and write vividly about the deeper meanings of current events (1997: xiv).

4. Becoming Visually Proficient Means Learning a Craft

Many of the first visual sociologists were closet photographers. They loved the craft of producing pictures as much as what the pictures themselves represented. For sociologists who weren't photographers, however, the technical challenge of making good, or even adequate, images constituted the biggest obstacle to developing a visual sociology. In recent years the development of increasingly user-friendly technologies has, for all intents and purposes, removed this obstacle. Nevertheless, it is extremely important to remember that, as idiot-proof as these new technologies may be, working with images is still a craft and that many of the rules of any system of apprenticeship, or good workmanship, apply in full force. The most important rules of thumb that should guide the novice are the following:

1. Respect and care for your tools. In visual sociology these can include cameras, camcorders, scanners, computer software, developers, film and video stock, computers, printers, projectors (slide or digital) and so on. This equipment either works well or it doesn't, and that usually depends on how well it is cared for and how appropriately it is used. Proper maintenance, good carrying cases and many other details are all necessary concerns and require space in either your office or your home and, certainly, always in your mind.

One corollary of this rule is always check your equipment to make sure you've got it all and that it is in working order before you go out to use it. A checklist is always helpful and in some cases you need to ensure that you bring replacement equipment. Having enough batteries and film is always a concern. This rule also applies to the equipment you plan to use in the classroom to display images. There are few situations more embarrassing than having planned a class around viewing slides or video clips and then discovering that the projector or monitor doesn't work.

2.Take one step at a time. Every craft process has its logic and rhythm and involves a sequence of steps. Once you know what the major steps are and then execute them deliberately, most frustrations will be minimized. For example, load the camera before you ask permission to photograph. Your subjects will not appreciate standing around while you fumble with the equipment. What's more, not having equipment ready is an invitation for disaster, because the investigator's attention is preoccupied with technical details rather than focusing on the analytic complexities of a photo opportunity. Equipment should always be ready to use.

If there is some aspect of technical preparation that is unavoidable, however, then inform your subject that it may take a few minutes to set up the equipment and either let them go about their business or engage them in conversation about what you are doing and why. A discussion of the technology being used is an invitation to share your world and can build rapport. It is important to avoid discussing substantive issues that more properly belong to the purpose of the interview itself while you are unable to devote your full attention to those matters.

I've described this situation at some length to provide a flavor of what managing even the few initial steps in a process might be like. The more that these steps can be anticipated and executed in sequence, the easier the process will be. If there is a corollary to this rule it is this: Always allow more than enough time! A useful rule of thumb here is to make a reasonably conservative estimate of the time needed to complete a process and then double it.

The most important reason, however, for taking a step at a time is that each step is not just a part of a mechanical sequence, but is also very often a point for making important choices. The kind of film you use, where you set up the interview site, the types of establishing shot you make, can all have significant consequences for the final product. You want to be able to be aware of what your options are, and have time enough to give them a bit of thought.

Figure 6. Godfrey Frankel photographed scenes like this in Washington DC in 1943. In 1993 they were used to elicit testimony from people who had lived there as children at the time. Frankel and his collaborator, Laura Goldstein, captioned the photo as follows: "In that awful place where I lived there was so much love and affection – not just in my house but in all of Southwest. We had a real community (Frankel, 1995: 48-49).

3. Everything proceeds by trial and error. Be prepared to fail at even some of the simplest tasks. You may not have noticed that your subjects were so backlit by a bright sun that they have become little more than silhouettes and so an entire role of film and a shooting opportunity is wasted. That happens! That's why it is important to practice with new equipment and to allow plenty of time to set up shots. Be reassured, however, that some failure is not only inevitable but also valuable preparation to learn from those mistakes so as to minimize their chances of recurring. The more important a particular operation may be, the more that we make sure we've covered all our bases. Using a brand new super-duper camera, for example, on an important shoot without having tested it is a recipe for disaster.

But, as sociologists we should be familiar with this rule of thumb. It's no different than the one that has us pretest surveys. Practicing shooting and then carefully viewing the results is an important way of identifying flaws. If work in the classroom entails displaying student work, be sure to have a "critique" of how well technique is realizing content as a component of any discussion. Identifying what it is that makes one student's work strong, and having them talk about what they did, is one of the very best ways of having the rest of the class improve their performance.

4. Start simply. While there is much to be said for shooting lots of film, you should only do so if it doesn't distract you from the substantive goal of your project. As a rule it is probably better to aim for ten good photographs rather than one perfect one or a hundred hasty ones. The important thing is to allow yourself enough time to shoot at least several photographs for each item on your shooting script. For screening in the classroom, however, it is often better to display a few good images rather than show lots of images. Properly chosen, one image or one video clip should be able to provide you with all the material you need for a thoughtful discussion of the image and the issues it raises. Nevertheless, a carefully chosen contrast with one other image or clip can really focus a discussion. You don't have to have a slide-tray overflowing with slides to have a rich encounter with visual data in the classroom.

There is an additional advantage to starting simply (and remaining there for as long as you can). It enables you to pay sufficient attention to the rich information in the image and socializes your students into developing the kind of patient concentration that working with social information in general, and images in particular, requires. Too many images force you to rush through the material and inevitably trivialize it as source of information.

5. Always Produce Images.

Even if your interest in visual sociology is restricted to analyzing images produced by others, you should still produce images for yourself on a fairly regular basis. There are three major reasons why this kind of experience is important. First, your photographic experience will give you a basis for understanding what the limits of the media may be and for appreciating the accomplishments of others. The more that you

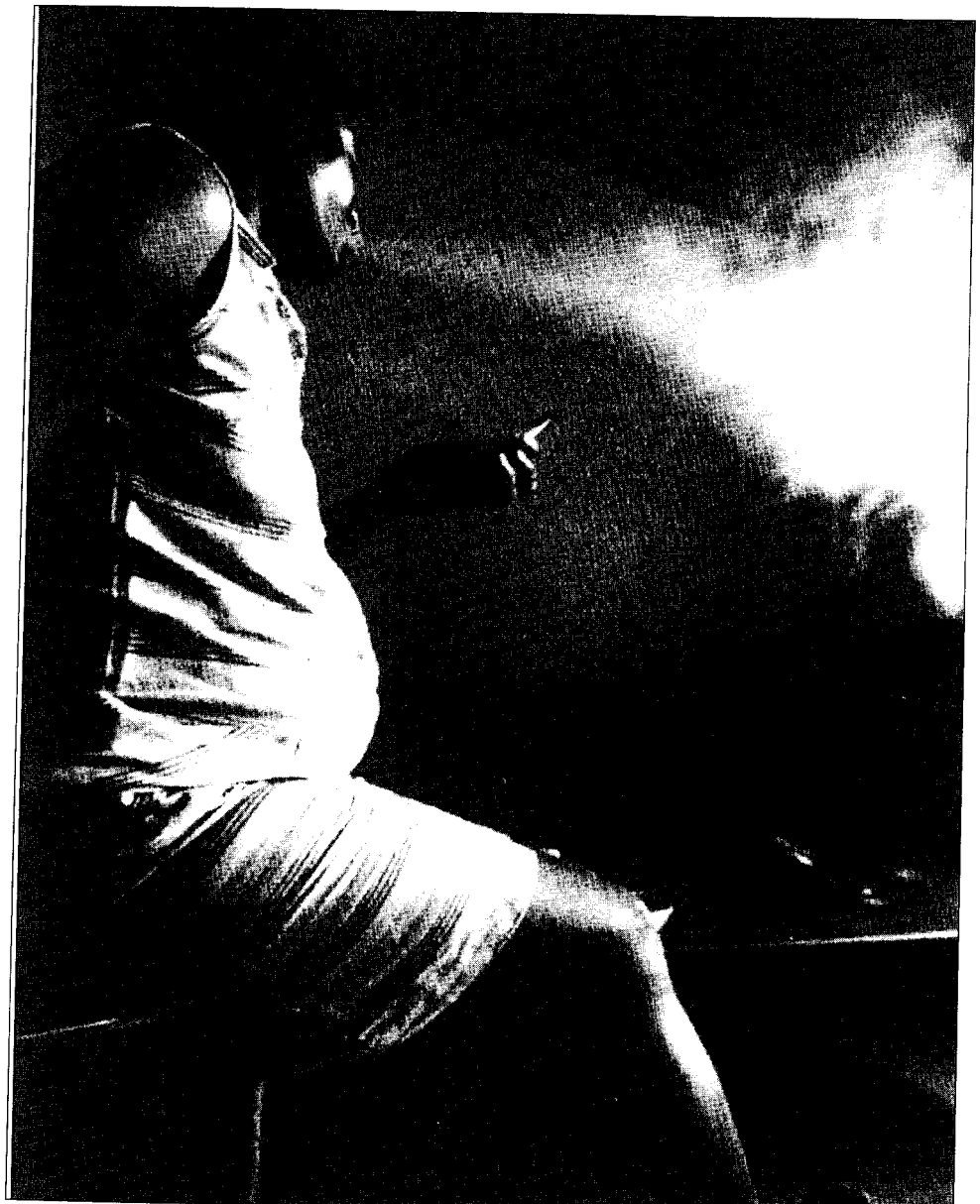

Figure 7. Eugene Richards does not caption each of his pictures in **Cocaine True, Cocaine Blue.** Rather, he intersperses them with extended interviews and his own running commentary about what he experienced and saw the day he was photographing. The following comment appears to refer to this photograph: "Corinne, who's seven months pregnant with twins, takes vitamins and goes to McDonald's if she thinks she's not getting enough food, but like the other women she doesn't eat when there's crack to be smoked (Richards, 1994: 35, 39)." These photographs were shot during the early 1990s in Red Hook, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York.

shoot in an intentional and focused way, the more you will come to understand the choices that go into the production of images. Second, producing images will help train and refine your "eye." You will start to see more in other's prints than you saw before. Third, you may find that even simple exercises will provide you with material that can be used to complement the work being shown in class. Many studies by visual sociologists and photo or video documentarians can be replicated in the places where you live and work. In some cases they provide models, or implicit shooting scripts, for photographing a setting or subject that you are studying non-visually and which will provide you with material you can use in your research or the classroom. Reduced to a nutshell, the rule of thumb is: the more you shoot, the more you see.

The following pointers should get you started.

First, start with simple, easy to work technology. For most sociological purposes, a good point and shoot camera will do just fine. Having a zoom lens is good, but only if it has a wide-angle capability. Wide-angle shots are very useful because they include more of the scene than regular or zoom lens. You may end up, in fact, doing much of your shooting in that mode. If you buy a 35mm standard reflex camera, you will find it useful to experiment with different lenses, filters and film stock. Generally speaking a good rule of thumb for beginning is to shoot wide angle (if you can), set the f-stop somewhere between 8 and 11 and use 400 ASA film.

Second, compose your materials simply. Always frame your subjects so that both they and what they are doing is visible. As a general rule, try and get as much of their immediate environment into the shot without losing your subjects in the frame. If you are using video, the most important thing for novices to learn is to hold the camera still. As a general rule, movement should happen within the frame, and not by you moving the camera. Begin by avoiding zoom shots, pan shots and all the nifty things you see on TV and, if possible, always use a tripod for shots. In fact, after the camcorder itself the two most valuable pieces of equipment for video production are the tripod and two kinds of microphone: a lavaliere that can be attached to a speaker who is sitting and a hand held mike that can be used for street interviews. Be aware that capturing good sound will be a recurring challenge.

Third, evaluate your shots. Look at what you have produced carefully and note what is good or not so good about them from both an analytic and aesthetic standpoint. Keeping notes about camera settings, lighting conditions and other pertinent issues is extremely useful for coming up with ideas about how to change your shooting strategy in the future. This is especially true for that which most disappoints you. Figure out an alternate approach and see if it solves the problem. In this regard, new cameras often come with manuals replete with pointers that can be very helpful. In addition, there is a virtual library of guides to photography and home video production that are generally quite instructive and inexpensive.

Finally, use a film stock that satisfies as many needs as possible. Shoot slides — unless you have access to digital editing and projection — for the simple reason that

Figure 8. This photograph of "Curtis Felton and his son Dominic, out for some early morning exercise" was taken by Jeffrey and is included in Roland Charles and Toyomi Igus' **Life in a Day of Black LA**. The photograph faces the following text: "Black Los Angeles refers less to a particular community than to the collective consciousness of the African-American people of Southern California. Black Angelenos reside everywhere: from Culver City to Compton, Westwood to Watts, Pasadena to Palms. Some of us live in extreme affluence, others in suffocating poverty. But all of us rise each and every day with a goal: a plan to make our mark upon the world – in one way or another. As the sun rises over East LA and heads towards the ocean, the day begins for most of us the way it does for folks anywhere else in the United States: with the newspaper, a hot cup of coffee, or an early morning jog ... (Charles and Igus, 1992: 16-17)."

projecting a slide on a large screen makes it possible to view small details that might otherwise be overlooked. In addition, it is easier to share the materials so projected with a class. You also should feel comfortable shooting color film. Many visual sociologists prefer to use black and white film and, while there is much that is valuable about its legibility and permanence, its status among visual sociologists is mostly an aesthetic inherited from documentary photography. In any event, color is an important dimension of how we see the world.

6. Look at Other People's Work.

Looking at, and working with, other's images is useful for several reasons. First, it can give you ideas for improving your own work. You can begin to see what can be done with composition, lighting, cropping, and editing by noticing what the masters have done. Visual sociologists tend to be aesthetic minimalists and discipline their choice of effects only to those that emphasize social meaning. But making aesthetic consideration secondary is not a license for poor craftsmanship. Everything else being equal, the more arresting an image the better, and there is no better way of learning how to do that than by looking at what really good photographers and moviemakers have done.

Second, the work of others can stimulate your imagination in ways that are especially useful for your research interests or in the classroom. Photojournalists and documentarians have been particularly interested in exploring the diversity of human experience and have done remarkable studies of ethnic groups and institutions, deviant communities, and social issues. They have also been quite interested in exploring the taken for granted world as well as little known aspects of contemporary history and culture. Much of their work can be found, with or without the assistance of a reference librarian, in the art collections of good research libraries. A pleasant way to begin to explore the limits and opportunities of the craft is to become accustomed to always having one of these books out of the library. They can be read in installments – one or two images at a time, if need be. It is also useful to use post-its or scraps of paper to identify those that are of particular interest and, whenever possible, scan and save them on a Zip disk using Adobe PhotoShop. That way they will always be readily accessible for classroom display. It is true, of course, that the quality of documentary photography and photojournalism is uneven and only rarely is it informed by sociological training. But this distance from sociology is, in fact, a great opportunity for the sociologist to identify the frame of reference evident in the work and to define the character of its implicit sociology and evaluate its adequacy for social analysis. The best way of going about this is to establish a framework based on comparing and contrasting various images of the same subject matter.

Recently I asked students to compare three depictions of the African-American community. Godfrey Frankel's *In the Alleys: Kids in the Shadow of the Capitol* (1995) is a series of images of the Negro communities living in the alleys near the Capital

building in Washington, D.C. during the 1940s and 50s. Frankel wanted to document poverty and need in the midst of affluence and power. The photographs are quite arresting but, apart from some groups of small children and one interior shot of a family group who appear to be somewhat uncomfortable with his presence, all of the images are distance shots of exterior scenes. They very clearly show one side of life in the alleys, but they appear to be photographed by someone who is obviously an outsider and whose purpose was to document a world composed of victims of discrimination and marginalization.

Eugene Richards' *Cocaine True: Cocaine Blue* (1994) was not intended to be a study of the African American community and, in fact, one of the neighborhoods he studied is a white one in Philadelphia. The book, however, explores the world of crack addicts and most of the images are of African Americans and Latinos. While Richards clearly sees his subjects as victims of discrimination and poverty, what comes through most strongly in the images is a picture of chaotic social disorganization. Richards' shots are mostly close-ups of people destroying their own lives and those of their children. *Cocaine True: Cocaine Blue* is great photography, but it still is a gallery of images that represents the inner city as a sink of pathology. How representative are his images of the communities he shot in, or even of the people whose lives he has documented? Is his, perhaps, a "white view" of the African American community as some of his critics claim?

Life in a Day in Black L.A (Charles and Igus 1992) is an explicit attempt by a group of black photographers to correct the white image of the ghetto — and especially Los Angeles — as a world of gangs, drugs, and rioting. Moving comfortably from distance shots to close-ups, but mostly staying in middle distance, they document a varied community composed of small businesses, artists, community activists, blue collar workers, high achieving professionals, good students, and the like. The book has an explicit black flair and includes nationalists and Muslims as core members of the community. The narrative that accompanies the photographs is resolutely ideological and the photographic style is not unlike the *Day in the Life of [a Country]* series it was modeled on. But even though the photography is not memorable, this community version of a yearbook makes a strong point. If you knew us, you would see and photograph us differently than you do!

Establishing that different people will photograph the same world differently is an important lesson for students to learn. It is also very valuable to demonstrate that different types of people may have quite different interests in how the same world should be depicted. The most exciting and promising challenge, however, is to figure out what a set of images reliably represents about its subject matter and then triangulate this information with other sets of images.

7. Visually Transform Existing Courses by Constructing Discrete Modules.

The most elegant, satisfying and easiest way to start doing visual sociology in the classroom is to create discrete modules, or learning experiences, that have a clear role in

the syllabus. Nevertheless, small exercises and interventions shouldn't be announced in the syllabus because the element of surprise might help to introduce a note of spontaneity that will keep the class fresh. You should be quite clear, however, about what you want to accomplish. What this means practically is that you should have an "entrance," a "plan," and an "exit" for each module.

An entrance is a brief introduction that provides a framework for what the class is about to view. You should tell them what type of material will be viewed, how long it will take, where and for what purposes it was originally produced, why it is relevant to the course, and what questions they should keep in mind as they view the images.

The plan covers what you do once the images are shown. It is often useful to have the class freewrite their impressions for two or three minutes immediately after the viewing and use these as a basis for discussion. If it is a long piece you might advise the class to take notes. Viewing images tends to spark freewheeling discussions, so there is a danger of getting distracted by tangential issues. Reminding students that the images contain evidence, which will provide answers for assigned questions, is a good way of maintaining focus as well as developing students' proficiency in analyzing images as data.

The exit involves summarizing the discussion, linking it to the readings, topic or issue being addressed and then announcing what is next on the agenda. This is in many ways one of the hardest things to do in teaching, although it's one of the most exciting. It is always possible, however, to establish a preliminary closure for an encounter by telling the class that, while it is time to move on, you will return to these issues later on. Then, when you figure out what surfaced in the discussion and what to do about it, you revisit the issue.

There are three major kinds of modules, which I have termed "appetizers", "entrees", and "banquets". Appetizers and entrees only require one class period while a banquet may span several. An appetizer is intended to whet the appetite and to use the images to stimulate a discussion about other materials. The images are entered into the discourse as data, it is true, but they are intended to play a subsidiary function to the topic at hand. At best they should involve no more than a few images or a video clip or two.

In my sociology of work course when I discuss trade unionism, for example, I begin the class by showing two short video clips. The first is a scene from *F.I.S.T* with Sylvester Stallone, which is a fictionalized account of the life of Jimmy Hoffa. The scene is based on an actual event that took place during the Minneapolis general strike of 1934, when the Teamster's Union fought a pitched battle with the deputies hired by the companies, and won. Stallone is marvelous in a stunning oration as he transforms an aggrieved and demoralized body of union men into a mob of avenging angels. Chanting "FIST! FIST! FIST!" they storm out into the night to do battle.

The second clip is a scene from *Norma Rae* with Sally Field playing a working class heroine in a southern mill town who becomes the leader of a union organizing drive. The clip opens with her being kicked out of the factory for her organizing activities by

management and the local sheriff. She eludes their grasp as they conduct her through the factory floor and, amidst the din of the weaving machines, she leaps on to a table, hastily scribbles a message on a piece of cardboard, and then stands up and displays a sign that says just one word: "Union!" Slowly, worker after worker shut down their machines and the factory finally becomes silent. Finally, and in triumph, our heroine consents to being escorted from the factory.

Each clip represents a distinct perspective on the constituting myth of the labor movement: the ethos of solidarity. The powerless can become a force to be reckoned with, but only when they act in close concert. F.I.S.T expresses the bestial possibilities of this kind of mobilization. Stallone is transmogrified into a demagogue and his union into a mob. Norma Rae's vision is more idealistic and angelic. Field's spring on to the table is an act of exemplary daring that quickly freezes into a tableau reminiscent of the crucified Christ. She has suffered on behalf of others. Witnessing her passion, her fellow workers each choose to support her rather than pursue their narrow self-interests and so begin to create the beginnings of a better moral order.

The pedagogic purpose of the clips is to help the class focus on an assessment of the accomplishments and failures of the labor movement as well as its organizational and cultural significance in capitalist and industrial societies generally. In addition, these films, which were released in the late 1970s, are important cultural and historic documents. They attest to an emerging ambivalence in American society about the labor movement in particular and the ethic of solidarity in general. The preoccupations of these films suggest that the ethic of solidarity — which had played such an important role in American culture and politics since the Great Depression, World War II and through the rise of the Civil Rights movement in the late 1950s — was increasingly seen as problematic. The clips, therefore, are provided to the students as new data that functions to dramatically frame what they have been, and will be, reading and discussing.

Visual materials serve as more of an entrée when they become the focus of a class. Nevertheless, as a rule of thumb their display should never consume more than one half of the class period. Any more than that makes it difficult to have a thorough discussion of the information the images provide and the issues they raise. Whereas an appetizer whets the appetite for the other materials in the syllabus, an entree provides students with a venue for bringing all the other information together and to come to some sort of conclusion.

My sociology of work course is planned as a sustained comparison of Japan and the United States. The idea is to see to what extent cultural variation plays a role in the ways that work is institutionalized and experienced in late capitalist societies. I have found that *The Faces of Japan* television documentary series hosted by Dick Cavett is a wonderful resource for this course. Each of the thirteen 26 minute films focuses on the problems and concerns of a particular person who is invariably defined by the kind of

work they do. The producers are enormously sensitive to the cultural context of their subjects' lives, but they are just as concerned to portray how each of these individuals handles all the competing demands on their personal situation. Thus, we see the Japanese as people who face many of the same problems that Americans do as they maneuver through a different institutional framework with their own cultural script.

One of the films in the series, *Leaving the Shipyard*, focuses on the choices faced by a middle-aged welder in one of Japan's troubled shipyards. Faced by stiff Korean competition, the company has been forced to retrench. Mr. Nakimuru is not laid off, as he might be in the U.S., but rather is sent to another branch of the parent company where he has to be retrained to manufacture auto parts. The company is honoring its policy of lifetime employment but for Mr. Nakimuru it means spending a year five hundred miles away from his family, a comfortable seaside home, and his beloved garden.

This short film brings together a number of themes: the vulnerability of blue collar workers to economic and technological change, the importance and difficulty of retraining, the trade-offs between different kinds of job security arrangements, as well as cultural differences in family decision-making. The film becomes a kind of lynchpin for all the issues that the syllabus raises in that part of the course. It and other films in the series are an important part of my syllabus. I expect students to take the films seriously, to use them as a way of framing the issues of the course, and to account for them in their writing assignments.

A banquet is a module of one or two week's duration. Here visual materials are used as the centerpiece of one of the major components of the course and constitute the primary materials for the subject at hand. This might involve a film festival, slide lectures, a focus on published photoessays, or perhaps student presentations of visual research projects they have completed. In some cases, these materials may be so tightly woven into the fabric of the course that it is hard to separate them as a distinct module.

My introduction to sociology class contains as many materials about China as I can work into the syllabus. My goal is not only to show how the basic concepts and research protocols of sociology can be applied to a very different society and culture, but also to foster a sustained encounter with an "other" of undeniable power and significance. I begin the course by considering the "great transformation" that took place from a traditional, pre-industrial, agricultural world to what we in the modern industrial world have become. Along with their readings, I require that the students view a feature film *Girl of Hunan* by one of China's new wave of great directors, Fie Xie.

The story concerns a young woman's troubled life after an arranged marriage to a small boy. The film is powerfully evocative and clearly shows how the needs and wants of an individual are subordinated to the vested male interests in a system of clan patriarchy. Not only do I require that the students view the film outside of class, but also that they come to class prepared to discuss the film. In addition, their first writing

assignment for the class is a sociological autobiography ("my life in groups") that asks them to explicitly compare and contrast their life and world to that of the protagonist and her village. Near the end of the course, when we are discussing social change, modernization and levels of development, I require the viewing of another first-rate Chinese feature film, *To Live* by Zhang Ximou, which recounts one family's experience of the last fifty years of Chinese history.

The final assignment in this course is an essay comparing the culture, social structure and social and economic development of China and the United States. In addition to the assigned written materials, they are required to write a final essay which must incorporate *Girl of Hunan*, *To Live*, and one of the hour long documentaries in the splendid twelve part British series, *The Heart of the Dragon,* that treats various aspects of Chinese culture and daily life. The rationale for choosing these three films is that *Girl of Hunan* is a depiction of traditional village life, while *To Live* is a panorama of the social changes that have taken place over the last half century, and the *Heart of the Dragon* documentaries focus on contemporary cultural patterns.

8. Construct an Entire Course

As your interest in visual information, proficiency with managing the production and display of images, and success with introducing modules into your courses all increase, you might find that it is time to construct an entire course on visual sociology. Many of your colleagues have done this and some of the results of their efforts are to be found in Diana Papademas' *Visual Sociology and Using Film/Video in Sociology Courses* (1993) which is available from the ASA. You may find that their syllabi provide a useful model for building a course. The keyword in all of this is to use your imagination to construct a course to your own satisfaction. You may have particular research and teaching interests that no one has yet explored visually, and your creativity in this regard could be an important contribution to an evolving field.

The following types of courses, however, are the most likely to become part of an emerging visual sociology canon over the next decade or so. They include the study of social issues and problems, deviance, most social institutions (especially work, urban, health and illness), social inequality (especially race and gender), ethnographic field methods, social research methods, mass communications, and film and society. Generally speaking, most of these courses are currently an integral part of many departmental offerings but are taught more or less traditionally with hardly any visual component. The first step, therefore, might be to visually enrich an existing course or courses in a sustained way. For some courses this might be easier than for others. Courses on gender, race and ethnicity, inequality, work and occupations, health and medicine, urban communities and so on are ones that are not only easily susceptible to visual treatment, but also are topical areas where lots of relevant visual material has already been compiled.

The general rule of thumb for visually transforming a course is to begin in two ways. First, cull libraries and archives for any collections of photographs and movies that pertain to your subject. Scan and inventory them for possible use in the classroom. Second, imagine the ways in which any kind of visual information might enrich the teaching and researching of your subject. Then search for collections of, or devise ways of producing, such images.

Most traditional courses on institutions and issues can be "visualized" in this fashion. An alternative or complementary approach is to imagine a treatment of the visual issues raised by traditional sociological concerns. In this instance a course would focus exclusively on the social meanings of various kinds of images. Entire courses could be constructed around how a society or different societies represent race, gender, inequality, wellness and illness, age, and so on.

The feature film is the signal art form of this century. Going to the movies or watching videos is a regular routine for the vast majority of the population who, for the several hours that it takes to watch a movie, put their engagement in the workaday world around them on hold, and immerse themselves completely in an "imaginary world" that, as it is experienced, often feels more real than the one they occupy. In many ways, movie watching appears to have claimed many of the functions that religious belief and practice played in more traditional societies. Unfortunately and surprisingly, movies have not been given the kind of thorough scrutiny by social scientists that they deserve.

There is much that would repay sociological interest. How movies are produced, marketed and consumed; how celebrities are made and how they function symbolically in contemporary society are all interesting aspects of a very important and enormously influential industry. Perhaps of great significance are the films themselves and what their content reveals about the nature of a society's preoccupations and concerns (Powers et al. 1996). Box office hits are a particularly sensitive indicator of what it is that a society finds problematic about the moral order and often reveal the tensions and strains that only later surface in open institutional conflict.

A careful look at the depiction of gender roles in post-WWII films demonstrates a recurring concern that anticipates Betty Friedan's identification of the "problem with no name" by more than a decade. Feature films, in general, provide us with a rich and unique repository of primary source materials about the realignment and readjustment of gender roles and expectations that have taken place over this century. In addition, a significant number of nations in the world today have thriving film industries, and their feature films (even if they are not box-office hits) are invaluable sources for studying the mores and preoccupations of other societies.

It is advisable to focus a course on film and society on the analysis of the content and thematic structure of the movies that the industry produces. Other aspects of the industry as a system of production, distribution and consumption should be subsumed in a course that focuses on mass communications. Whether such a course considers the process of communication generally or specifically focuses on the visual media (movies, television,

the Internet), this is a venue for exploring an extremely important part of contemporary life.

Two other courses that deserve consideration are methodological. While ethnographic methods should be covered in any methodology course, a course on visual ethnography really requires its own course. The best way to teach the course is to embed technique into a discovery process where students are required to produce a final report either in the form of a photo essay or a video documentary. While some attention needs to be paid to show students how to use the equipment, much of the course time should focus on a collective critique of their material and the quality of the theory they are generating. The most important point in such a course is that students learn to work in a methodical manner, keep careful and abundant field notes and other data, and routinely log the result of their shooting schedule. Above all, the biggest challenge will be to get students to realize that, while there is great latitude for inspiration in handling a camera, the old saw that all genius is the result of 99% perspiration is only too true. It is, in this course, especially necessary for the teacher to provide regular required assignments (scheduled shoots, field notes, brief essays, etc.) which are strictly and toughly graded, to ensure that they learn that lesson from the very first day of the course.

A very useful course for any department could be entitled "visual research methods." Its function would be to expose students to the variety of ways in which visual images can be used for research purposes. Such a course should be constructed around a set of exercises that require the application of a particular technique. These techniques should minimally include: photo-elicitation in interviewing; content analysis of found materials; photography of discrete behavior and artifacts for explicit research purposes; thematic and content analysis of cultural narratives like movies, TV shows and comics; and visualization in the social sciences. It is probably best for the teacher to select the exercises and provide the necessary databases. To the extent that these dovetail with the instructor's interests, then it is possible to create the conditions and climate of a genuine research community with a vested interest in the quality of their findings.

9. Produce a Visual Essay

There are three major different kinds of visual essay that a sociologist might be likely to produce: a photo-essay, a video documentary, or an analysis of visual data. These can be produced in a variety of expositional styles and in accord with different scholarly conventions. Many social scientific journals are increasingly interested in publishing analysis of visual data although they are only slowly beginning to publish actual images. Nevertheless new technological developments in printing make it increasingly cost effective to produce black and white images as well as text. Currently among peer reviewed social science journals, however, only *Visual Sociology* enthusiastically welcomes articles that contain visuals.

The Internet and various web sites, including your own, are a promising new media for disseminating your work. The next several years will surely witness the formation of

peer reviewed processes for "publishing" various kinds of visual work, including documentary video. These new venues will initially be looking for material, so it is not too early to begin producing work that could be put on the web. The web will provide a boon for sociologists in two ways. First, the web provides an opportunity to construct a workable peer reviewed process for disseminating sociological movies. Second, the web will enable sociological moviemakers to break the hold that commercial TV standards have had in determining how long a movie should be. It is only the exceptional and acclaimed moviemaker, like Frederick Wiseman, who is able to do a six-hour film and have it shown on television, and few have been able to distribute very short pieces. Sociological moviemakers will find that many of their subject matters can be treated adequately in ten to twenty minutes and that their colleagues will find these products more useful in the fifty minute class format.

Again, the watchword is to begin small. A well conceived photo-essay of a process, event or setting, or a carefully edited video interview can provide all that is needed to produce a thought provoking argument. *Betty Tells Her Story* (1972) is a short video that should be in every sociology instructor's kit bag. It is quite possibly the simplest documentary film ever made. It is no more than two takes of a woman telling the same story about an important event in her life. It is a poignant story – or is it stories? – of loss and self-esteem that should be required viewing in many sociology courses. It can be used to discuss the sociological imagination in introductory level courses; beauty and self-esteem in courses that consider gender; status loss in courses on stratification and inequality. Above all, it can be shown several times to the same class as a way of discussing what goes on in an interview and refining students' theoretical sensitivity to understanding social process. There is simply no reason why a novice visual sociologist shouldn't be able to display professionally significant work in the classroom and at professional gatherings within months of having first picked up a camera.

But as rewarding as putting energy into classwork, constructing new courses, and producing essays of one kind or another may be, it is important to realize that your efforts may still be marginalized. Administrators may think that you are little more than an over paid audio visual instructor; your colleagues may wonder where you fit in the discipline; and students may worry about where all this might lead. There is simply no way that visual sociology will ever be fully accepted in higher education without mobilizing students, organizing colleagues, and building effective professional coalitions.

10. Empower Your Students

One of the nice things about introducing visual materials into the classroom is that it sparks interaction with your students. Everything else being equal, students will spontaneously have a lot to say about a publicly displayed or collectively viewed video. But also, without direction and focus, this discourse in relatively short order tends to the banal. It is important to provide students with incentives that encourage an increasingly

professional attitude to working with them. Visual work makes it possible to empower your students intellectually, but empowering strategies are an essential ingredient to reach that goal. Five such strategies are particularly useful: effective classroom roles, writing assignments, visual research exercises, discovery opportunities, and subsidizing skill development.

Whenever you display and discuss visual images in the classroom it is extremely valuable to use the blackboard to focus and record student discussion. The more open ended the discussion and the more that it culminates in an assessment of what has been seen in guiding hypotheses for future work in the classroom, the better. Students will see that their good ideas are taken seriously and that these ideas will have a role to play in the course as it unfolds. Copying down what is put on the board — always a good job for one of the students — can provide you with notes that you may want to refine for the next or other subsequent meetings. Of course, being able to refer favorably to good student ideas makes this process all the more effective. But even relatively pedestrian ideas can at least be used as a foil of sorts to lead into other discussions. The more seriously you take students' good work, the more seriously will they take the entire enterprise.

It is important to integrate the display and discussion of images into requirements and grade-producing assignments for the course. This can be done in tests where writing an answer to a question posed as an image is displayed on a screen or monitor. Take-home essay assignments that require that students integrate the analysis of specific images into the paper are especially valuable.

It is very useful to prepare term paper topics based on the analysis of visual data. This requires a bit of work but the results can be quite rewarding. A useful way of going about it is to articulate a hypothesis based on traditional sociological concerns and suggest that it can be tested by analyzing a certain body of material or by actual field research using a camera. You should assemble the bulk of the materials you want them to analyze and put them on reserve in the library or provide them with a rough shooting script for their topic. Investigations of new materials with old ideas, if done in a disciplined and competent fashion, almost invariably turn up interesting twists that provide students with a genuine sense of accomplishment while deepening your own understanding of an issue or a field. In a very real sense the directed research topic can be a form of faculty development.

For some topics and assignments you can challenge students to come up with new sources of data that speak to the topic. Often, a direct challenge to try and disprove a hypothesis will motivate students to use their imaginations in quite creative ways. The excitement generated by a search for new information often improves the morale of the class and encourages students to work harder. It can also provide you with interesting material that can be used in subsequent classes or your own research.

Finally, many students are appreciably more advanced than we are when it comes to using technology. They often know how to use new technologies we are barely literate

in and are not afraid of muddling through. It is usually easy to identify the class "hackers" and provide them with a role helping other students learn how to use cameras, software programs and the like. In fact, even the slightest incentive to master a new technology will yield results. Announcing that I would give extra credit to those who submitted their visual work digitally resulted in a flood of PageMaker documents with accompanying diskettes. When you provide the will, students often discover the way. The most important thing is to make sure that the learning curve takes place outside of class time. Mastering new techniques always proceeds by a process of trial and error and invariably will use up class time that should be devoted to more focused analytic activity.

11. Organize Your Colleagues

If there is anything about teaching today, it is that it is being transformed by technology. More and more of our traditional tasks — like lecturing, talking to students, helping them with library searches, and so on — can now be done more easily with the aid of one kind of technology or another. In addition, we increasingly have the capability to do things in our teaching that not so long ago were either impossible or prohibitively expensive. These include various ways of displaying information as well as the possibilities for interactive learning provided by a myriad of new software programs. Finally, the new technologies are increasingly digitally integrated, which has the long range promise that a teacher will be able to not only teach class but create a range of learning experiences on the fly.

Put most starkly, the more technologized the academy and the classroom; the more opportunities will there be for working with images. There are, of course, many complex technical, economic and political choices about which new technologies should be brought into the teaching enterprise and how they should be implemented. These are issues with which you should concern yourself and you should become active in whatever faculty committees your institution has created to either advise or oversee the construction of a new technological environment. If your college doesn't have such a committee then this would be a marvelous opportunity for you to take the lead in establishing such a group. What should your program be?

First, there are a number of specific new technologies that are invaluable to teaching and doing research in visual sociology. These include powerful desktop computers with enough memory to store visual images; scanners, for importing hard copy visual images into digital form where they can be modified, assembled for display or incorporated into a database; and software programs designed for visual work. I have access to Adobe PhotoShop for scanning, I-Movie and Final Cut Pro for video editing and File Maker Pro for constructing visual databases. On the more costly end of the scale are initiatives to hard wire the campus so that communication through the Internet becomes possible. Your own web site can be used for interactive displays of visual materials. With passwords that restrict access to your database, you can have virtually unlimited access

to found images and still operate within the bounds of current interpretations of copyright laws. Finally, more and more colleges are beginning to experiment with pilot classrooms "loaded" with high technology equipment. Cameras and editing facilities for video production and editing are also a real plus and can start simply as an adjunct to your campus academic computer center. It is not necessary to know much about technology or even what equipment you need. That knowledge is a staff function for information services. What makes you invaluable is that you can define real needs: what a technology should be used for. Staff members in academic computing or information services are a medium looking for a message. You are invaluable to them because you have messages to send.

Second, agitate for visual resources. A good college library should develop a permanent video collection that can be used for classroom showings as well as for viewing in the library itself. As a rule of thumb, video is more flexible than film (e.g. you can easily rewind, if necessary), is cheaper, less costly to store. The DVD format has all of these advantages and more. As you start to use visual images for data analysis purposes rather than the traditional audio-visual illustration approach, you will discover multiple uses for the same video or portions of it. It is cost effective to always have it, or its equivalent, available. Another important resource includes a growing number of digitized photo archives.

Third, it is important to build coalitions with other departments in agitating for visual resources of one kind or another. These include your colleagues in art history and graphic design; photography and video production; history and all of the natural sciences who have long used visualization in their curriculum and who now have access to simply incredible visual resources for modeling phenomena; film studies and, of course, academic computing. All of these are disciplines that have been in one way or another either under funded or overburdened by managing visual work on heavy, unwieldy and inflexible equipment and who have a vested interest in new technological investment.

The basis for an alliance is a natural one. Academic computing centers want to expand. They know what the new technologies can do and want to interest faculties in using them, but don't really have a clue about specific applications faculty would find useful. Visual sociologists, anthropologists and the disciplines mentioned above not only have ideas about what they would like to do, but also have solid track records implementing these ideas.

Fourth, it is important to put pressure on your institution to support faculty development in the new visual and digital technologies. Summer workshop stipends, release time for new course preparation and the like, subsidizing the acquisition of new hardware and software, are all initiatives that would make it easier to explore visual sociology in your classroom and department. It should go without saying that concerns with visualizing sociology in tandem with improving initiatives to improve statistical

literacy are a way to put sociology and its concerns at center stage in the shaping of new curriculums and educational programs.

12. Become Active with Other Visual Social Scientists

All knowledge is created in intellectual communities. It is hard to continue in any endeavor without interacting with co-thinkers and colleagues. Finding people in your own institution who work with images, whether sociologists or not, is one step in this direction. Another step is becoming active in professional associations devoted to the social scientific study of images. These include the International Visual Literacy Association (IVLA), website: http://www.ivla.org; the Environmental Design Research Association, e-mail: edra@telepath.com; and the Society for Visual Anthropology, website: http://www.xensei.com.docued.sva. All of these organizations have annual meetings, publish newsletters and, in some cases, journals. Especially important for sociologists, of course, is the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA).

The IVSA has been in continuous existence since 1983, publishes the journal *Visual Sociology* bi-annually, has a web site (http://www.visualsociology.org) and a listserve. The listserve provides instant access to a community of over 200 active visual sociologists. Instructions for how to subscribe can be found on the IVSA website.

The IVSA's annual conference is scheduled either for the end of June or the beginning of July. Currently, the organization meets in Europe every third year. Conferences include workshops on teaching and technique and sessions that reflect the variety of work that is done in the field. The organization prides itself on its collegiality and has no concurrent sessions. Special sessions for student work are integrated into the program, and all conference registrants attend each session. Ample time is allowed for the critical analysis of papers, the vast majority of which are accompanied by visual slide presentations or documentary footage.

Membership in the IVSA is quite inexpensive. Membership fees are $55 a year for regular members whose income exceeds $50,000 and $45 for those whose income is under that figure. Students and the unemployed are charged $25. Membership entitles you to voting privileges at the annual meeting, a subscription to the journal *Visual Sociology* (soon to be renamed *Visual Studies* and published by Taylor and Francis), and other benefits. Most of all, however, it welcomes you into a supportive community of scholars who are struggling with all of the issues associated with viewing images as data.

CONCLUSION

The interests of visual sociologists are as wide as the field of sociology itself. The only thing that distinguishes them from their colleagues is their sustained commitment to using images as a form of social data and as a medium for reporting research findings. Like their colleagues, visual sociologists believe that a well-trained sociologist should be a perceptive observer and sensitive interpreter of the human scene and its

environs. Their specific contribution has been to argue that sociologists need to expand their intellectual tool chests to include images as well as words and numbers.

There is no way of avoiding the fact that proficiency in visual sociology requires developing an extensive knowledge in the craft of image making. Technological trends, however, have made the equipment needed to produce and display the kinds of images of most use to sociologists more accessible and affordable. There is thus no longer any serious material obstacle to creating a more visual sociology.

This paper has argued that classroom instruction provides a venue for removing the major subjective obstacle to making sociology more visual: inexperience in the craft of displaying and analyzing images. The classroom is the primary work site for most sociologists and is remarkably suited to a step by step introduction of visual materials into the curriculum. Properly managed this step by step process can also function as an exhilarating apprenticeship in learning how to make images competently, interpret them responsibly, and display them effectively. The result can only be a stronger and more sophisticated sociology.

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