

International Conference of Visual and Filmic Sociology

From the Viewpoint of Everyday Life

University of Evry-Paris Saclay

29-30 September 2016

organised by

University of Evry/Paris-Saclay *Centre Pierre Naville*

University of Genoa *Sociology of Visuality laboratory*

French Sociology Association (*GT 47*)

This international conference is intended to establish an inventory of European research groups working on *Visual and Filmic Sociology*. The aim will be to create a loose network to augment a specific understanding of the practices and approaches that sociologists apply when developing work from filmic and visual perspectives. As far as possible, conference communications should relate to participants individual work (photos or film excerpts).

Visual and Filmic Sociology seeks to account for the complexity of interpretations of reality that are rarely unequivocal. This sociology begins by questioning the appropriateness of associating the term “scientific” with sociological discoveries and asks what role the proliferation of narratives has played in this respect. Other questions include the role played by a sociologist’s gender; whether the basic research paradigm varies for cinematographic as against photographic forms; and the role that sensitivity to (and the materiality of) objects and bodies – together with the symbolism of gestures - plays in understanding everyday life.

The importance of everyday life

This topic has been of great interest to a range of sociologists (including Henri Lefèbvre and Erving Goffman), philosophers (Michel de Certeau) and psychoanalysts. Depicting objects through the creation of images and sounds takes on a whole other dimension here, in part because it creates a potential need to re-think the distancing that should be taken from otherwise familiar objects.

The question then becomes whether this topic is universal or particular in nature. The idea here is to stop and take a look at moments in people’s lives, i.e. not viewing life as a continuum but as a collection of fragments that may or may not have intrinsic overall meaning, even if some bits of hidden meaning are revealed under scrutiny. In the way that it frames things and the multiple perspectives it enables, filmic sociology makes it possible to analyse all these scenes, moments and fragments of everyday life from a wide range of perspectives.

Routine

Authors sometimes emphasize everyday approaches when questioning routines and repetition. At other times, they will tend to highlight quantum leaps caused by violent but necessary adaptations (unemployment, moving house, divorce, etc.). The city where people live and work, an individual’s neighbourhood, schooling, family, the coffee shops that people visit, intercommunity relations and migration –these objects are all highly conducive to images and sounds. Authors may do no more than to describe and enunciate them - or instead they may try to delve more deeply by highlighting the collective or individual positions that people take.

The unsaid

Everyday life is clearly rooted in the social sphere and can be used to justify narratives about inequality and class or gender domination, while explaining the bases of the great injustices that permeate the modern world. Like sociology, cinema is quite obviously political in the way that it constructs itself and finds space in economies suffering a structural crisis. The question this raises

is how *Visual and Filmic Sociology* uses the unsaid and unseen as concepts for “talking about what society doesn’t do anymore”.

The primacy of viewpoint or perspectives

Questioning people’s everyday perspective is a way of contextualising the tensions found in the things that seem ordinary (or “natural”) in people’s everyday lives as well as the way in which the sociological approach develops tools that account for social reality and explain its foundations. By transcending more traditional methods found in scriptural (paper-based) sociology, the new variant necessarily asks new questions by inventing mechanisms that change the relationship between observers and their object of analysis. A partial list of possible new themes might include:

1 - Film writing and the viewpoint of everyday life. The question of the relations between the sociologists’ viewpoint AND the location of his or her camera and microphone is posed here; beyond, it is also the question of the framework, and the “off-screen” that is asked (focal, viewing angle, sound spectrum...)

2 - Being at one with the people we study: affect and sensitivity in the scientific construction.. Does the use of the film and photo camera foster the development of subjective capacities that open to the expression of affect and sensitivity, which follows the project of comprehensive sociology? How can we bridge the oppositions between objective camera and subjective camera?

3 - Visual and filmic sociology, a evident research stance? Does the viewpoint of the sociologist-filmmaker get to be more visible when the research process includes image and sound recording? Is the relation between the researcher and his or her subject modified or, in other words, what are then the relations between the one who films and the one who is filmed? How can the intentions and the biases of the sociologist instantiate themselves in the photo or film work that is produced?

4 - Photography and cinema facing sociological schools of thoughts. Is there a place in visual and filmic sociology for the reproduction of the tensions between the main schools of thoughts of sociology? What place is there for example for “individualistic” and “holistic” bias? What place can take the importance assigned to social structures or to immediacy of intersubjectivity?

Films or photos of everyday life appear to be an excellent way of revealing the epistemological questions evoked by the way that sound and vision are being used in sociology and ancillary disciplines. The aforementioned questions are only a few of the many that might be asked, with participants being free to add to the list.

Proposed communication (maximum 800 words or 5,000 characters) can be written in French, English, Italian or Spanish (note that debates will be held in French and English). Submissions must take place before 30 March 2016 and be sent to Joyce Sebag (joyce.sebag@gmail.com), Jean-Pierre Durand (jpd.duran@gmail.com) and Luca Palmas (luca.palmas@unige.it). They should also indicate the photographic or filmic materials that are being. The Scientific committee will select final conference communications in March with authors being requested to submit their final paper before June 15, 2016.

Scientific Network

Elena dell’Agnese, Université de
Catarina Alves Costa, Université de Lisbonne
Andrès Antebi, Université de Barcelone
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Émilie Balteau, Université d’Evry
Alain Bouldoires, Université de Bordeaux
Cécile Canut, Université Paris Descartes
François Cardi, Université d’Evry
Cécile Cuny, Ecole d’Urbanisme de Paris / Lab’URBA

Roberto Cipriani, Université de Rome
Gregory Cohen, Université d'Evry
Sylvaine Conord, Université de Paris-Ouest Nanterre
Alessandro Diaco, Université de Gênes
Jean-Pierre Durand, Université d'Evry
Nesma Elbatrik, Université du Caire
Émilie Fernandez, Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès,
Jean-Pascal Fontorbes, ENFA (Ecole Nationale de Formation Agronomique)
Annalisa Frisina, Université de Padoue
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Virginie Villemin, Université d'Evry

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Jean-Pierre Durand, University of Evry
Christine Louveau, University of Evry
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