ESRC SEMINAR SERIES: VISUAL DIALOGUES: NEW AGENDAS IN INEQUALITIES RESEARCH (draft)

SEMINAR ONE: *Here's Looking At You: Photographic Practices and Methods*

ABSTRACTS

Dr. Caroline Bressey, Department of Geography, University College London.

Seeing colour in black and white.

Those recovering the historical geographies of black people in Britain have found visual archives, from Hogarth to prison mugshots, an essential part of the research process. In my own research on the black presence in Victorian Britain photographs have proved to be an essential and dynamic resource, allowing the colour of people's skin to still be seen where it has been erased in written archives of asylums, prison records of census returns. But there are problems with this methodology. What of 'mixed race' men and women who appear 'too white'
to be picked out in such an identity parade? And, what of people of 'Asian' decent who may appear 'white' in black and white photos that erase the pigmentation of their skin? In this paper I will highlight some examples which illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of the visual record and suggest the need for overlapping methods to be used so that a (more) complete understanding of both visual and written archives can be developed.

Professor Rosalind Gill, Centre for Culture, Media and Creative Industries, Kings College London

 'Objectification': what is it good for?

In this presentation I consider whether or not the notion of 'objectification' -- so long a key term for thinking about the links between visual culture and inequality -- is still analytically and politically useful. I will briefly discuss the way this term has been used and understood before moving on to explore three significant challenges to it from changing representations of gender in advertising.

First, I will discuss a shift in representations of (some) women -- the shift from depicting them as passive, objectified victims of an assumed male gaze, towards

a more active, knowing, humorous and even empowered mode of address. This is what I have called the shift from sexual objectification to sexual subjectification, and I will argue that it represents the transformation in the ways in which power operates in visual culture.

Secondly, I will examine transformations in the depiction of male bodies in mainstream visual culture, which have led some to argue that "we are all equally objectified now". I will critically discuss this claim, opening up questions about how to analyse visual culture, and interrogating whether 'objectification' resides in the representation itself or in the cultural histories of practices of looking that gave rise to it. Why do representations of semi-naked men on billboards not seem 'objectifying' in the way that apparently comparable representations of scantily-clad women do? Does the answer lies in some formal quality of the image (pose, lighting, mise en scène) as some have argued, or, alternately, in the complex relationship between historically/culturally located subjects and representations?

Thirdly, I will discuss the trend within contemporary advertising to draw attention to and humorously send up or ironise 'objectification' as a practice. This is connected to a particular postfeminist, post-'political correctness' moment, in which critics of objectification are accused of 'spoiling our fun'. I will look at the way in which objectification is trivialised as a practice, through the assumption of egalitarian social relations (not borne out by other evidence) -- which is simultaneously undermined by the gratuitous display of women's bodies.

Taken together, these three shifts require a rethinking of the analytical and political usefulness of the term 'objectification'. Is it worth defending and/or do we need different critical vocabularies to engage with inequalities in/and visual culture?

Professor Ian Grosvenor, School of Education, University of Birmingham

The School Album: images, insights and inequalities

Using a school/class photographic album from 1920s Birmingham
this paper will explore the nature of images, their hidden meanings
and the importance of contextualising the visual. Consideration will
also be given to how digitisation can transform original images
and their meaning.

Dr Wendy Martin, Institute for Ageing Studies, Brunel University.

The use of visual images to elicit insights into ageing bodies, 'risk' and everyday life.

The aim of this paper is to explore how the development of a visual methodology can elicit insights into social identities, ageing bodies and daily lives. With illustrations from data, this paper will first report findings from a study that explored visual images associated with health, risk and well-being targeted at people aged 50 years and over. It will be shown that two themes emerged: 'active ageing' and 'health, risk and dependency'. Perceptions of risk were heightened by intersecting images of domesticity with symbols of risk, danger and alarm. Gender, ageing and the body were further intertwined within these visual images. Second, the paper will show how visual images can be incorporated into biographical interviews. The method of photo-elicitation not only facilitated participants to reflect on their own meanings and identities associated with ageing', risk and bodies, but highlighted the significance of their biographies to the interpretation of visual images. This paper will conclude by exploring possibilities for future research that focuses on ageing, bodies and daily life.

Dr Virginia Morrow, Institute of Education

Using visual methods to elicit young people's perspectives on their environments: Some ideas for community health Initiatives

Abstract: This paper describes qualitative methods used in a research study conducted in the late 1990s for the former Health Education Authority, exploring Putnam's (1993) concept of 'social capital' in relation to children and young people's well-being and health. Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital consists of the following features: trust, reciprocal support, civic engagement, community identity, and social networks; and the premise is that levels of social capital in a community have an important effect on people's well-being. Research was carried out with 102 children aged between 12-15 in two relatively deprived parts of a town in SE England. The research used a range of methods, including photography and map drawing by children and young people, to explore their experiences of their neighbourhoods in ways that are usually neglected in studies of health-related behaviour. The paper explores how the methods generated different forms of interconnected data, giving rise to a number of health/well-being-related themes.

Alison Pointu, University of Hertfordshire

'Through their eyes': the use of visual methods to capture the lived experience of ageing"

People with learning disabilities like the rest of the UK population are now living much longer; this is especially the case for women with mild learning disabilities. Although there is some research on the impact of ageing, there is a limited understanding of their 'lived' experiences of growing older. Research with other vulnerable groups has demonstrated how the use of visual methods can overcome some of the communication barriers that traditional research methods pose; emerging evidence of research with people with learning disabilities reinforces this position.

Over the past fifteen years there has been a growth in participatory research where people work as co-researchers. In this vein an expert reference group of four women with learning disabilities worked alongside me to test and develop research methods. We explored the use of visual methods, in particular photographs taken by the women themselves. The learning from this has been incorporated into the design of the study that integrates narrative and photo-elicitation methods.

People with learning disabilities continue to be one of the most excluded groups in the UK, and we have to ensure that research methods are inclusive and accessible. This paper will critically review the limitations and possibilities of visual methods. I will argue that if the researcher is able to acknowledge and work with the limitations the possibilities are enormous. A camera in their hands enabled the women to talk about their experience of ageing and captured life through their eyes.

Dawn Raybould and **John Needham,** Milton Keynes LiNK

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) were set up by the Government in 2008 to empower local people to influence the planning and delivery of their health and social care services. The Milton Keynes LINK (LINk:MK) has developed as an active network of citizens, groups and communities. On the basis of its success, LINK:MK has been awarded a grant by the Dept of Communities and Local Government to investigate whether the model it has built could be extended beyond health and social care services – i.e. to enable citizen involvement in all local services. The two year Action Learning project is focussing on Coffee Hall, a small urban Milton Keynes neighbourhood (population 2092 (2001 census)) , to see whether the LINk:MK model of involvement can help the community's issues and concerns to be effectively addressed. Reactions at initial meetings with local residents and provider organisations indicate that the project is welcomed and supported. The Project is managed by a Steering Group with membership from LINk:MK, Coffee Hall community and residents groups, parish councils, Milton Keynes Council and the Open University.

Dr. Sheena Rolph, The Open University

Ethical issues in the use of photography in historical research

This paper focuses on the relationship between images and ethics. We draw on research conducted in care homes for older people, exploring ethical issues relating to the use of photography in historical research. We examine different ways in which older people were represented in the photography of care home life in the 1950s and the early 2000s, and how these differences relate to changes in ethical procedures over the last 50 years. For example, the photographs taken by sociologist Peter Townsend for his classic study of residential care for older people and published in his book *The Last Refuge* (1962) were taken under very different conditions to those governing our own research 50 years later. In comparing our photographs with his, we discuss the taking and archiving of photographs and the impact of consent procedures. The paper raises questions about the ethics of recognition versus the ethics of anonymity which relate to the broader issue of what constitutes historical and sociological evidence.