

Introduction

This book project took shape within the framework of the Key Research Area Visual Studies in the Social Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Vienna. Scholars from the disciplines of communication studies, political science, social and cultural anthropology, and sociology established this research focus in 2006. Since then, it provided a space for exchange, networking and interdisciplinary discussion in the form of workshops, conferences and regular meetings, primarily for young academics. Over the last 15 years it became abundantly clear that many of the various projects of the members have contributed to innovation and cross-fertilization of visual research. The editors of this volume wish to make these projects visible to a broader public. In line with both the diversity of disciplines and the thematic orientations of the projects, the preparatory phase of the book production was dedicated to a discussion of the respective understanding of images and the exchange of views on the commonalities and differences of the methodological paths developed in the empirical projects. The latter are the focus of the contributions. Hence, the volume also provides an insight into present-day visual methodologies and methods.

Some of the contributions gathered in this volume are more closely embedded in disciplinary discourses on visual method developments, while others draw on methodologies and methodological tools from other disciplines. However, these are combined, adapted and further developed in specific ways according to the research topics and the research questions. Knowledge transfer from art sciences on the one hand and media studies on the other play a central role in the question of the specificity of fixed and moving images. In this way, the contributions connect to discourses in image, film, media and generally visual studies, which have given rise to vivid and innovative fields of research over the past 25 years. Of course, the book by no means represents the entire spectrum of approaches that have become relevant in the social sciences over the last decades. For this reason, it is not a handbook, but a result of the collaboration of a group that has teamed up in an institutional setting. We are particularly happy that the book mainly presents the work of younger academics. In this vein, the volume is also primarily aimed at this target group, and provides insights into the potential of diverse visual methods for social science research.

We asked the authors to present their particular methodological approach, starting from a theoretical position on how visual action and visual communication, respectively visual politics, societal visual discourses or the cultural use of images are addressed. They were also invited to demonstrate at least a rudimentary implementation of the respective approach using a concrete example. The contributions therefore also contain empirical analyses of different visual media in different social contexts with different thematic foci. We offered the authors the option of writing their contributions in German or English. The latter option was not only taken up by native English speakers, but also by some authors who want to increase their visibility in

the international discourse. In this way, we hope to contribute to the dissemination of different approaches to visual analysis across different scholarly cultures. Each contribution has been subjected to a double-blind peer review process.

The arrangement of the contributions reflects both the diversity of the approaches and topics and convergences in terms of methodological orientations. The latter comprise Visual Segment Analysis, the Documentary Method, visual anthropology and ethnography, sociological film analysis, discourse-analytically oriented video analysis, two types of participatory photo interviews and the visual essay. About half of the contributions focus on phenomena related to Social Media. The other half is dedicated to various topics such as visual construction processes of national identity or of sex work, the opportunities of intervention in socio-political processes, and visual traces of a former concentration camp.

The first two contributions apply Visual Segment Analysis to diverse thematic fields: biographically relevant pictorial action in Social Media on the one hand, and public press images of the 2015 refugee crisis on the other.

In her contribution “*Iconic Mental Spaces in Social Media. A methodological approach to analysing visual biographies*”, Roswitha Breckner uses Facebook photo albums to reconstruct how visually shaped biographies emerge in Social Media through acting with images and how this relates to narrated life stories. The author links Aby Warburg’s concept of mental space with Erving Goffman’s concept of visually ritualised social interaction. She understands curated image compilations in Social Media as *biographical iconic mental spaces*. To methodically capture the diverse image activities on Facebook – from posting single images to compiling image series in albums – the Visual Segment Analysis developed by the author is combined with Michael Müller’s Figurative Hermeneutics and Image Cluster Analysis. These various approaches to image analysis are triangulated with a narrative-biographical interview. The multi-method research design is demonstrated in individual steps using the study of a Facebook account of a former Erasmus student and the reconstruction of her biography as examples.

In his contribution “Symbolic ordering. Reassuring the imagined community of the nation through images of the refugee other”, Johannes Marent uses cover images of selected German and Austrian newspapers to show the implicit function of the representation of refugees for the process of “othering” and the confirmation of dominant national identity constructions in the host society. As an illustration, the author applies Visual Segment Analysis to two front-page images of the German newspaper *Bild* from September 2015 and reconstructs relevant sets of cultural representations. Both images show condensed “symbolic moments” in which the complexity of flight is reduced, differences are evened, and viewers are emotionally addressed. The visual construction of a hierarchy between a benevolent, generous German nation and the refugee “others” becomes apparent. This construction contrasts with the idea of universal human rights that underpins asylum legislation.

The following two contributions by Maria Schreiber “Digitale Ambivalenz? Übergangsätzlichkeiten in der Bildkommunikation auf Social Media” and by Gerit Götzenbrucker and Margarita Köhl “‘You can tell that we all like each other, right?’ Perspectives of togetherness in adolescents’ photographs in urban Austria, Malaysia and Vietnam” are based on analyses using the Documentary Method.

Maria Schreiber’s contribution focuses on acting with images on Facebook and Instagram and builds on a detailed reconstructive single-image analysis of a photograph of a young girl that is systematically compared with an analysis of a photograph of a member of the 60+ generation posted on Facebook. By consistently applying the formal steps of this method, the author presents the logic and procedure of the Documentary Method and shows how ambivalences and over-contradictions as defined by Max Imdahl can also be identified in vernacular photographs on Social Media. Finally, she relates these aspects to the generally ambivalent and ambiguous structure of visual communication on Social Media. In doing so, the author embeds her analyses in a broad context of communication studies.

Gerit Götzenbrucker and Margarita Köhl use image samples from three different cultural contexts while taking a comparative look at them. The authors are interested in how togetherness of teenagers and young adults is staged on Social Media and which commonalities and differences can be observed across cultural-societal contexts. Their analyses are essentially based on the interpretation of photos using the Documentary Method, combined with a content analysis of interviews based on theoretical categories drawn from Pierre Bourdieu. The contribution highlights the importance of specific local, social and societal patterns of the representation of togetherness in teenage peer groups in a technologically globalised communication culture.

The next two contributions follow considerations on the conception of visual and media anthropology based on a visual ethnography grounded in practice theory, and represent these fields of research in an exemplary manner.

Philipp Budka explores cultural and social anthropological perspectives on digital-visual practices under the title “Kultur- und Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven auf digital-visuelle Praktiken. Das Fallbeispiel einer indigenen Online-Umgebung im nordwestlichen Ontario, Kanada”. He pursues specifically anthropological questions using a concrete local case study about the indigenous internet organisation MyKnet.org in the northwest of the Canadian province, which operated an online environment exclusively for First Nations. The author analyses digital practices in remote areas and over greater distances with regard to forms of communication as well as individual and collective forms of representation, social relations and identity constructions. The media ethnographic contribution focuses on practices such as the creation and sharing of graphics, collages and layouts for websites. The author approaches the digital-visual culture in this area with a historically contextualised practice-theoretical approach, which he combines with ethnographic field research in a comparative perspective. This provides an exemplary insight into the intercon-

nectedness of global and local digital-visual practices and their significance for the construction and negotiation of digital identities.

Hanna Klien-Thomas and Petra Hirzer dedicate their contribution “Wenn Bilder tanzen. Performative Dimensionen von visuellen Medienpraktiken” to complex transcultural and media entanglements, which are embedded in image worlds familiar from Hindi films as part of global mediascapes. The authors connect the transcultural circulation of Indian popular culture (Bollywoodization) with the performative dimension of images. Based on a concept of active recipients and reception as a social practice, they comparatively examine transcultural fan cultures and associated hybridisation processes in Peru and Trinidad from a media anthropological perspective. The studies are largely based on participatory observation online and offline. They open up empirically sound insights into explicit, but also concealed aspects of the reality of life and the visual practices of actors in processes of meaning-making and interpretation in the production and reception of media content. The ethnographic research approach also enables a perspective on visibility that takes into account the relationship between popular culture text and local reception context.

While the contributions introduced so far exclusively focus on fixed images, the following two articles present approaches to the analysis of moving images using film and video as examples.

Irene Zehenthofer and Eva Flicker adapt tools from film and media studies for their contribution “Soziologisches Filmlesen. Methodologische Konzeption und Praxisanleitung anhand der Beispielstudie ‘Sexarbeit in ausgewählten österreichischen Kino-Spielfilmen’“. The authors have developed the methodological approach of sociological film reading and follow explicitly sociological concepts, knowledge and questions. The analysis also systematically includes formal characteristics of the medium of film, such as the combination of image, sound and music, specific montage techniques, narrative structures and character constructions. In various individual steps, the dimensions of content and form relevant to the respective film are reconstructed by means of a detailed question guide. Sociological film reading also goes beyond the analysis of individual films and, in a cross-film synopsis of a larger number of films on a specific topic or from a specific genre, allows qualitative as well as quantitative insights into how social problems are dealt with in film and how this in turn can be understood as part of social discourses.

In her contribution “‘Radikal Feminin’. Eine multimodale Analyse des YouTube Videos ‘Frauen gegen Genderwahn’“, Karin Liebhart applies a discourse-analytical approach to the analysis of moving images. She examines a YouTube video produced by Martin Sellner, at the time of the analysis a central representative of the “Identitarian Movement Austria”. The article presents video as a multimodal form of communication, characterized by the interplay of image, text and sound. The author proposes to combine approaches from discourse analysis, semiotics and video sequence analysis in order to flesh out the messages and discursive strategies represented in

this video. The contribution shows how textual and visual levels interlock to produce a narration of traditional, strictly heteronormative gender images and related roles, which are constitutive for the political worldview of the extreme right-wing “Identitarian Movement” and its sexist and racist politics.

The following two contributions are part of a research tradition in which images, usually photographs, are not examined as encountered visual material, but instead are produced during the research process. However, the production of images and their function within the research process vary greatly.

In the article by Bettina Kolb and Laura Lorenz “Photo interview and photovoice. Engaging research participants, empowering voice and generating knowledge for change”, two approaches are presented: Participatory photo interview and photovoice, which follow a similar basic idea but propose different research designs. Both are concerned with the participation and activation of research participants with regard to social issues and problems that need to be dealt with (socio-)politically. In the participatory photo interview developed by Bettina Kolb, actors are asked to take photos on a specific topic, which are then discussed in detail in an individual interview. Photos and interview are analysed following interpretive methodological principles, aiming at contributing with the results to socio-political discourses and action. In contrast to this, with photovoice the researchers primarily pursue the goal of working out the relevant aspects of a topic for the group in joint discussions with actors on the basis of photos. The authors refer to a project in Mexico in the context of poverty reduction on the one hand and to a municipal project in the USA in the context of removing barriers in urban space on the other.

The final contribution is the visual essay by Margarita Wolf, in which, in contrast to the participatory photo interview and photovoice, the photos are not taken by actors in a socio-political field, but are made by the researcher as an instrument of analysis. In her contribution “Auf Spurensuche. Zur Konzeption eines Visual Essays über ein ehemaliges Konzentrationslager”, the author explores the question of how visibility in social science research can be put in a productive relationship to text and narration, and how it can be included in the presentation of the results in a methodologically justified and controlled manner. This also includes reflexive considerations on the production of photographs in a context that is particularly challenging due to the history of the place. Furthermore, the author also asks what can be conveyed merely by images and in which cases verbal framing is necessary. In her visual essay, she demonstrates the potential of this promising research method using the example of three photo sequences of the former concentration camp Gusen in Upper Austria. These open up insights into the relationship between visibility and invisibility of the former concentration camp on the territory of which there is now a housing estate.

A synopsis of all the contributions makes clear how significant moving and fixed images are in various social, political, societal and cultural areas, let alone in the course of the digitalisation of image production, and how important it is to examine

them from social science perspectives. A variety of relevant theoretical and methodological approaches is already available, some of them have been applied in the contributions to this volume.

We wish you a stimulating reading.

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