

Professor Elaine Bell Kaplan
Office HSH 211
Office Hours: Tues-Thurs. 11:30-12:30
Email: ekaplan@usc.edu

VISUAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE URBAN CITY AND ITS RESIDENTS

*“Of Course in this you see more than I can see. You see me.”
Marlowe in Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*

*“We must measure our explanations against the power of
scientific imagination to bring us into touch with lives of strangers”
Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture*

*“Photological Proof is not stringent, merely Overpowering”
T. Adorna*

This seminar is intended for upper-division students who will meet one a week.

Most images of the urban city pitch it as either “fabulous” or “dangerous.” One can attend museums, theater, concerts, movies, and buy the latest fashions all within the city. It is also one in the residents walk the streets late at night, dance the night away, run into drug dealers, hear gun shots or find their cars burglarized. All this happens in small town America as well. But the urban city images are writ large. In other words, the urban city is a perfect place in which to capture images that speak to the experiences of living in and with these contradictions. In this course, we will attempt to capture these images and others as well as the social structures and social relations including race/ethnic dealings that may influence some images.

Visual sociology is an area of sociology concerned with the visual dimensions of social life. In this context, the camera is analogous to a tape recorder. According to John Grady, the classroom provides a very useful site for developing the skill and sensibilities of visual sociology. . Film and video cameras are particularly well suited as data gathering technologies for experiments and for small group interactions, classroom studies, ethnography, participant observations, oral history, and the use of urban space.

The aim of this course: is to develop students' potential to interpret the products of visual communication in a rigorous and sociologically disciplined fashion, to demonstrate utility of video-photographic technologies in field research, based on the Grounded Theory approach first developed by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glazer.

PhotoVoice blends a grassroots approach to photography and social action. It provides cameras not to health specialists, policy makers, or professionals, but to people with least access to those who make decisions affecting their lives. Photovoice has three main goals: 1. To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns; 2. to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs; and 3. to reach policy makers. (<http://www.comminit.com/en/node/201294>). Also for discussion of the benefits of using photographs, see Sarah Pink. *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*, 2nd. Edition, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007.

Images are unique forms of data. It is a physical record of something that has happened at some time or another. Images can represent complex subjective processes in an extraordinarily objective form. Learning how to manage and interpret images is an ideal way to learn about data in general and to introduce students to the craft of sociology. Thinking, writing and talking about and with, images not only can make arguments more vivid, but also more lucid.

Visual sociology integrates the analysis and production of visual representation into the disciplined study of social relations. What makes images so valuable as a mode of human communications is that they encode an enormous amount of information in a single display or representation. 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. Just imagine what students can discover about their own surroundings.

Being visual means learning a craft that allows you to bring your world alive with the use of the camera.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

This course is a small semester and as such, each person will make a contribution to the intellectual life of the course. To do so, each person will do all of the reading, become familiar with the terms and concepts used in the course and take responsibility for helping us develop them. At the conclusion of the course, all participants (including the instructor!) should know more about some aspects of social life than they did before the course, should have better skills for learning about the social world, and should have refined their observational skills, so that with or without the camera, they will be more knowledgeable observers of their surroundings. The final project will represent photos from everyone that have been critiqued and supported with written material that contribute to our understanding of the urban city and its residents. Students will read the required material, examine magazines to understand the power of images and their meaning to us and take photographs (\$5.00 disposable camera will work) of the urban environment. Students will form groups of 2-3 in which they will determine the focus of their photos, why that focus is meaningful to understanding the urban city, and what kind of images will best tell the story of that environment. The group will learn how to code the images, evaluate the shots, and present their work to the class. They will learn to evaluate the photos of others. Each group will write a visual paper.* See visual paper guidelines.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

DO NOT BE LATE: If you are over 5 minutes late, that will be counted as ½ day absence.

THIS SYLLABUS IS NOT WRITTEN IN STONE. SOME CHANGES MAY BE NECESSARY

The midterm and final exams will consist of short answers and essays. The midterm will be based on readings, lectures, film, and class discussions during weeks 1-6. The final exam will cover all course material.

NOTE ON REVIEWS: REVIEWS WILL TAKE PLACE IN CLASS. YOU SHOULD ALSO ARRANGE TO HAVE ONE INDIVIDUAL REVIEW MEETING WITH INSTRUCTOR PRIOR TO ALL EXAMS.

Joint Educational Project: You may choose to earn extra credit by participating in the Joint Educational Project (JEP). As a participant in JEP, you will serve as a mentor or tutor for children in local schools or after-school programs. Over the years, participants have found it both personally and intellectually rewarding. They have gained new insights about urban social problems. This is a chance for you to study how the concepts and issues that we discuss in class work in real life. If all goes well, you can use your JEP experience as the basis for a paper and earn a ½ final grade increase (for example, a final grade based on work= A- with JEP, final grade=A). You are also work on 1 other extra-credit assignments.

The Rules for Class room Etiquette

In this class, students will be encouraged to debate various controversial issues. In order to do so, we need to provide an open and supportive environment in which candid discussions can take

place and one in which students show respect for their fellow students and the instructor. Therefore, students will not engage in conversations with other students, rustling papers, make other kinds of distracting noises, which includes slamming doors when they leave or engaging in any kind of disruptive behavior during ALL class discussions **and ALL lectures. Students who do not observe this rule will be told to LEAVE THE CLASS AND MAY BE BARRED FROM FURTHER PARTICIPATION IN THE CLASS.**

Faculty Secrets to Getting an “A” in any class

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSVmgTLwUC4&feature=related>

General Policies

You are required to:

1. Complete all reading assignments before you attend class. You will get more out of the lectures and discussions if you are prepared.
2. Participate actively in class: ask questions, raise doubts, disagree with others (politely!). Take responsibility for your own, and others’ learning experience.
3. **TURN OFF YOUR CELL PHONE BEFORE YOU COME TO CLASS. IF YOUR PHONE RINGS DURING LECTURE, YOU WILL HAVE TO LEAVE THE CLASS.**
4. **DO NOT OPEN/USE YOUR COMPUTER IN CLASS UNLESS YOU HAVE PERMISSION FROM INSTRUCTOR.**
5. Attend class and sections regularly. If you are going to miss class/section, let your TA know in advance.
6. Do not indulge in academic misconduct (Do not talk or laugh with your classmate during lecture)
7. Express your perspectives/questions/doubts regarding the readings.

Required Reading:

1. Howard S. Becker. Telling About Society Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2007.
2. Mitchell Duneier. Sidewalk: With Photographs by Ovie Carter. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
3. Elaine Bell Kaplan. We Live in the Shadow: Inner-City kids tell their stories through Photographs, Temple University Press, 2013
4. Thomas Ward, Thomas Ward, Gangsters without Borders, Oxford University Press, USA, 2012
5. May hand out Xerox reading

Grades:

Mid-term	25%
Group Projects	20
Final Exam	25
Final Project	20
Attendance/Participation	10
	100%

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1
Jan. 14 **INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE:
ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS**
Philosophy, reading requirements, main themes
Handouts: Syllabus
Read and discuss syllabus
Discuss projects and how to read and analyze images in magazines

Discussions and examples of Visual Soc. on Facebook
Reading for next class: Howard S. Becker. *Telling About Society* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2007. Chaps. 1-4

Becker's book, *Telling About Society* explores the unconventional ways we communicate what we know about society to others. The book explores the many way knowledge about society can be shared and interpreted through different forms of telling fiction, films, photographs, maps, even mathematical models—many of which remain outside the boundaries of conventional social science. Eight case studies, including the photographs of Walker Evans, the plays of George Bernard Shaw, the novels of Jane Austen and Italo Calvino, and the sociology of Erving Goffman, provide convincing support for Becker's argument: that every way of telling about society is perfect—for some purpose.

Week 2
Jan. 21 **THEORIES OF VISUAL SOCIOLOGY**
Examining magazine and what messages they convey about society
Becker Chaps. 1-4
Discuss ideas for visual projects

We will discuss the theoretical explanation for visual social. particularly well suited as data gathering technologies for experiments and small group interactions, classroom studies, ethnography, participant observation, oral history, the use of urban space, etc.

Week 3
Jan. 28 **THEORIES OF VISUAL SOCIOLOGY CONTINUES**
Finish Becker, Chaps. 5-8, 13-14
Ward, chaps. 1-3

We will learn from Ward's reading how social scientists use qualitative methods of sociological research (ethnographic methods).

Each group will decide on a project involving the urban area and residents. For example, take pictures of area surrounding USC, or the urban neighborhoods where you reside, shop, or attend movies. What is it you want to tell us about that area and/or its residents? What story do your photos reveal that helps us understand urban life?

Week 4 **DOING VISUAL SOCIOLOGY**

Feb. 4 Ward, chaps. 4-6
 Kaplan , Part 1-3

We will finish our reading of Ward. With Kaplan's work, we will begin lecture to examine and practice ways to combine the two disciplines of sociology and photography. The lectures will focus on how to read and analyze images of the urban city and its residents in magazine.

Week 5 **DOING VISUAL SOCIOLOGY CONTINUES**

Feb. 11 Finish Kaplan
 Duneier, SideWalk, A statement on methods, p 333, chap. 1

We will examine the social context within which photographs are taken, are made available to various audiences, and are viewed and interpreted by those audiences. Here our concerns are with issues of representation and interpretation. We will rely on the writings of sociologists. We will also assess our own responses to images and sets of images presented in various contexts (online, in book and article reproductions, in exhibitions).

Week 6 **OBSERVING, APPROACHING AND BUILDING RAPPORT**

Feb. 18 Duneier, Part One
 Midterm Review and exam handout, Midterm due Feb. 25

We will also learn from Duneier how to use the camera as an observational and documentary tool. Doing visual sociology is not just a matter of knowing how to make photographs or recognizing what is going on; it also relies upon the capacity to approach people, build rapport, come back to approach the same people, and become part of a situation without changing it appreciably. This book investigates the complex social ecology of a three-block span of New York's Greenwich Village.

Week 7 Mid-Term
Feb. 25 Due in class,
 Ward, chaps.4-6, Duneier, Part Two

Week 8 **ANALYZING AND CODING PROCESS**

Mar. 4 For two weeks we will focus on analyzing class projects
 Duneier, Part Three

Week 9 **ANALYZING AND CODING PROCESS CONTINUES**

Mar. 11 Continue with Duneier, Parts –Four-Five

SPRING BREAK MAR, 17-22

Week 10 **THE VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS**

Mar. 25 For two weeks we will focus on how to write a visual paper

Week 11
Apr. 1 VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES
Finish Duneier

Week 12
Apr. 8 VISUAL PAPER PROJECT CONTINUES
The rest of the semester will be devoted to presenting and researching your project

Week 13
Apr. 15 VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES

Week 14
Apr. 22 VISUAL PAPER PROJECTS CONTINUES

Week 15
Apr. 29 THE FINAL PROJECT
The Urban City Collage
The final project will consist of bringing together the photos for Sociology department's Facebook

FINAL EXAM–Take Home
Due Thursday, May 8, at 2 pm.

Learning Goals for Sociology Majors

All sociology majors at the University of Southern California will gain a broad knowledge of how society works, and how a sociological understanding can enrich their lives -- personally, professionally, and as citizens of the world. The core knowledge and habits of thought offered by USC's sociology major include:

1) a coherent understanding of the sociological perspective:

- ** appreciation for the ways in which supra-individual factors -- social relationships, social policies, local and global institutions, social positioning, social differences, and cultural belief systems -- shape (and are shaped by) the behavior of individuals, institutions, communities, and nations
- ** a strong intellectual grounding in classical and contemporary social theory, and depth understanding of the disciplinary emphasis on the interplay of politics, culture, and economics in the making of social life
- ** comprehension of the mechanisms of social order and social change, along with a critical assessment of our own capacity for shaping public policy and instituting positive social change
- ** knowledge of the central debates in sociology and their practical impact on public opinion, social understanding, the media, and state and institutional policy
- ** an understanding of our own community, and an understanding of the multitude of diverse communities -- within Los Angeles, across the nation, and around the world

2) a solid background in USC Sociology's core areas of scholarly expertise -- social inequality and civic engagement: +

- ** exposure to the wide array of vibrant sociological subfields encompassed by these broad theme areas:
 - studies of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexualities, and national identities
 - the global order, global change, immigration, nationalism, and human rights
 - popular culture and media, science and technology
 - family, community, work, and religion
 - social problems, urbanization, violence, poverty
 - public policy, political sociology, and social movements

3) the analytic skills necessary to understand and evaluate sociological arguments and find answers to complex social questions:

- ** the ability to identify and assess the logic of an argument
- ** the ability to effectively convey, explain, and analyze the key theories and concepts of sociological analysis
- ** the ability to apply sociological concepts and theory to contemporary social problems

4) training in the application of sociological knowledge through active social research and civic engagement:

** broad familiarity with the methods for systematic observation of the social world -- in-depth interviews, ethnography, survey research, statistical analysis, and content analysis of both written and visual documents

** training to develop research questions, collaborate with others in research design, and plan independent research

** direct experience in conducting research using one or more sociological method

** direct experience in civic engagement -- through public service, media projects, involvement with community organizations, interaction through global internet resources, or internships with local, national, or global institutions

5) preparation to embark on meaningful careers in occupations that draw on a sociological understanding of the world:

** the knowledge and training necessary to move forward in the professional fields of education, government service, law, social work, public health, international development, human relations and marketing, community and labor organizing, public policy, and academic positions in social sciences.

** training in the habits of mind that will help you succeed in all careers (as well as all life endeavors):

- critical thinking skills - problem-solving

- intellectual flexibility - team work & entrepreneurship

- effective communication - research methods & data analysis

6) training to be thoughtful and engaged citizens of the world:

** preparation to be critical consumers of information from the media, the internet, social and political institutions, and local and global organizations

** the sociological knowledge for understanding, assessing, and actively participating in a global world.

INSTRUCTOR'S PROFILE

Elaine Bell Kaplan, Ph.D, University of California at Berkeley
Associate Professor of Sociology, USC
Research and Teaching specialization are in the area of Social Justice issues such as Social Problems, Social Inequality and Gender, Race and Class theoretical perspectives.

Elaine Bell Kaplan analyzes and researches structural conditions that restrict opportunities for racial/ethnic groups and children and youth. She has published various articles on adolescent issues using a gender, race, and class perspective. These articles have appeared in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Social Problems*, *Urban Education*, and other journals. Her book “Not Our Kind of Girl”: *Unraveling the Myths of Black Teenage Motherhood* (University of California Press, 1997) won the 2000 Distinguished Contribution to Scholarship Book Award from the Race, Gender and Class Section of the American Sociological Association. A recent study, “Boomers Keep a Tight Rein on Their Teens, was a featured story in several newspapers, including 2001/2002 by the USC Chronicle News. Her previous research and writing examined the issues and dilemmas facing parents who are raising adolescent children. Her article, “Doing Care on the Run: Family Strategies in the Contested Terrain of Gender and Institutional Intransigence,” is published in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. In Spring 2011, she developed a new course, *Visual Sociology of the Urban City*. Kaplan’s new book, *We Live in the Shadow, Inner-City Kids tell their Stories through Photographs*. This book explores inner-city life from the perspectives of 54 Black and Latino teenagers who live in inner-city Los Angeles. The objective of this research is to understand how inner-city teenagers make decisions to help them cope with family life, peer relations and academic achievement and handle the negative options that can poverty a life sentence; pregnancy, gang involvement and drug abuse. The ethnographic study of Los Angeles inner-city adolescents will deepen and enrich current theory by making explicit the complexities surrounding the lives of inner-city minority teenagers. Kaplan’s current study explores how blacks and others perceive the past, present and future lives of the black community. The study ask if African Americans are better off today under the Obama administration than under other administrations? How do others—non-blacks perceive members of the black community? Where do they stand on these issues?