

## Editorial

Julie Patarin-Jossec, John Grady, Gary Bratchford, Susan Hansen & Derek Conrad Murray

This issue of *Visual Studies* could easily be a special issue on filmic social sciences. In addition to book reviews covering film festivals, new media practices, Iberian filmic culture and film photonovels, five articles discuss what it's like to use film as a research method in social science (and why it matters).

First, Sofia Grunditz and Anna Grimshaw provide some food for thought on the value of film in disciplines wherein, still today, writing claims to cognitive authority. The title of Grunditz's article says it all: 'How to preserve the visible content of films *in visual form* throughout the analytical process?'. A clue: answering this question requires developing a multidisciplinary analytical framework and various skills that social scientists usually don't learn in their curricula. Using preschool naptime as the setting of her methodological experimentations, the author explains how to (try to) preserve visual aspects of original films throughout an entire research investigation – and doing so, invigorate time-old debates on the textual/visual nexus in the production and circulation of social scientific knowledge. For Grunditz, when 'just using words' is not an option, drawings can be the solution.

Anna Grimshaw, for her part, discusses collaboration and experimentation in anthropological film. Based on David MacDougall's work, the author highlights how film remains misunderstood in anthropology and develops a few ideas to help have film recognised as a medium for anthropological research outside of established textual conventions.

If after reading Grimshaw and Grunditz, you ever end up asking yourself how to develop a systematic use of documentary film, González's article might come in handy. The author proposes a typology of four different functions visual scholars may give to non-fiction film. Such categorisation helps, González argues, to better reflect on our documentary practices, in times characterised by data storage and 'documentary inflation'.

In two other contributions, Mandy Hughes and Michela Franceschelli emphasise filmmaking as a way to recount migration experiences. Michela Franceschelli's article tells about making a documentary about the people living on the Italian island of Lampedusa. While this island is a key point of entry for migrants who became the most visible representatives of the 'Mediterranean migration crisis', the filmmaking process allows the author to emphasise the local struggles of the Lampedusa community and to consider the potential (and drawbacks) of research dissemination through film.

Hughes's article, 'Filmmaking as empirical research: Working with people from refugee backgrounds to share stories about food', is a reflection on what collaborative visual research can do for ethics and equity in the field. Including not only Myanmar refugees' experiences in Australia, but first and foremost these refugees' own storytelling, allows the author to enrich ethnographic engagement and reflect on the recognition channels of visual scholars' works.

For both Hughes and Franceschelli, film does not only have value as a scientific method. It also allows their authors to reach a wider audience and sensitize a non-academic public to important social and political issues. This very same idea is what drove Sophie Harman (Professor at Queen Mary

University of London) in her filmmaking process, as you will read in the interview we conducted with her for this issue.

And speaking of this interview, we are thrilled to introduce in this issue the ‘New Media Review’ – an essay format that has been an occasional feature in *Visual Studies*, and which the current editorial board would like to see appear on a far more regular basis.

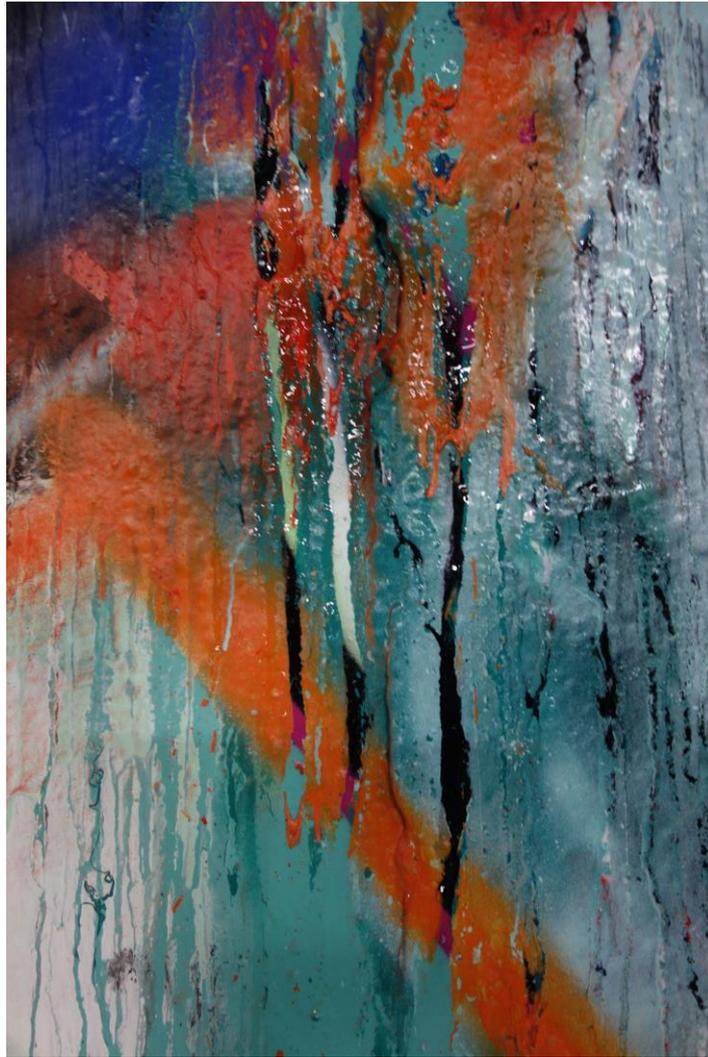
A New Media Review is a short essay (2000 - 5000 words) or an interview (3000 - 6000 words) that focuses on some aspect of the visual in social and political life, which the author believes deserves more attention than it has generally received. These reviews should explore what is going on in the world of new media, whether on or off the web. These can include television serials; fiction or non-fiction films; exhibitions of fine and popular arts; installations; graphic novels of one kind or another; books that explore various aspects of applied visual reasoning and communication; new technologies of visual representation, and so on: anything for which an author can make a compelling case that it communicates information that an informed public should take seriously.

A New Media Review provides an opportunity to directly address a general audience; to develop an accessible personal voice, and to explore issues in contemporary society and culture, as well as explore aspects of our pasts that may have been ignored or neglected. It is also an opportunity to describe – and analyse – emerging trends bubbling up in our contemporary world. Examples of New Media Reviews that have been previously published in *Visual Studies* include Elizabeth Chaplin’s essay on ‘[Bruno Latour’s Paris Invisible/Invisible Paris](#)’ (2007); Karen McCormick’s ‘[Revisiting The Wire](#)’ (2015); and Jon Wagner’s reviews of Michael Apted’s *UP* filmmaking project ([2007](#) and [2016](#)) – to name but a few.

If you have a proposal in mind, please feel free to contact John Grady at [jgrady@wheatonma.edu](mailto:jgrady@wheatonma.edu), with a one-page proposal including a description of the materials to be considered; an argument for their social and cultural significance; and why they might, or should, appeal, and be of value to, an educated citizenry.

Regardless of the form it takes, a New Media Review should draw our readers’ attention to a work that appeals to the journal’s diverse readership while exploring issues of broad cultural, social, political and (if appropriate) educational significance. That is why we are keen to introduce you to the work of an International Relations scholar who, as part of her feminist commitment and methodological reflection, integrates fiction filmmaking in her research. In a conversation that epitomises the purpose of the New Media Review, Sophie Harman talks about using film as a pedagogic resource, the recognition of filmmaking in academia, the ethics and social engagement of working with women affected with HIV/AIDS in African countries, and her views on the visibility of pandemics.

Last (but not least), we are delighted to feature on this issue’s cover Sabina Andron’s project ‘Graffiti, street art and the right to the surface’, which won the Prosser Award from the IVSA in 2020. This image, a close-up view of a wall in a legal graffiti spot in London whose evolution Sabina studied over a 100-day period, illustrates her method of ‘surface semiotics’ for interpreting visual inscriptions *in situ*. Sabina’s project also exists in the form of animated online gifs, which show the dynamic life of the transitions on the wall via repeat photography timelapse: <https://sabinaandron.com/leake-street/>. As is customary, the cover image, and Sabina’s explanatory text, are reproduced below.



Layers of spray paint drip on a wall in London's largest legal graffiti spot, the Leake Street tunnel.  
Photograph © Sabina Andron

*Leake Street has been open to anyone for wall painting from 2007 and has since become London's most prolific collector of spray paint layers on its surfaces. I became fascinated by this daily accumulation of paint in 2013, when I started working on my repeat photography project "100 days of Leake Street", which won the 2020 Prosser Award from the IVSA. For this project, I visited the space every morning over 100 consecutive days to photograph its constant changes and its stacking, thickening graffiti surfaces. This image, in particular, shows the cracking, dripping paint after a rainy period, when a constant stream wears away at the dried spray paint, making it sticky and changing its morphology. I often imagine the large arch of Leake Street tunnel closing in on itself under the excessive layers of paint, like a self-preserving cave of creative practice. The hundreds of spray paint layers can barely be glimpsed, but there is an incredible collective energy stored in them – the sort of energy which cannot be designed or programmed into any space. Reflecting on Leake Street during the Covid lockdown, I think of just how much is missed when the tunnel is not activated every day by writers, painters, local office workers, photographers, builders, tourists. Their traces are more evident here than in many other urban settings: they create a local graffiti geology. Having not visited Leake Street in almost one year, images like this are like a pluri-vocal whisper reminding me of the energy of urban togetherness, in all its messy, smelly, disorderly forms.*