A theoretical overview of the language of visual sociology

Gökhan Veli Köktürk*

Akdeniz University Antalya, 07058, Turkey

Abstract

In this study, it is tried to make an evaluation, on a theoretical basis, of the content and meaning of visual sociology, the relationship between visual images and culture, the methodology of visual sociology, the functions of sociology and sociologists at visual assessment.

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1. Introduction

The first step is primarily determination of what the visual images are meant for individuals, the people who come together. In this regard it can be said that, the sum of visual images are a total that reveal(present) the elements which have become a pattern of the social world in which we live and often do not notice. In other words, visual images show parallelism with the feature of dynamic and being a living of the language phenomenon and have the nature (quality) of the language of culture. Because the social world we live in constitute a whole of interaction between individuals, social relations, behavior patterns, social norms, subconscious influences, social values and patterns of belief; it cannot be denied the importance of sociological approach to the evaluation of social aspects of visual images and effectiveness of sociologists who are aware of the sociological approach, especially in terms of methods and techniques. Because visual sociology interests in all visual aspects of social life, it is directly related to sociology and sociologists who have high level of awareness. In this sense, visual sociology relates to the theoretical basis of all visual aspects of the social world. Sociologists who have knowledge of what

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +90 (242) 3106151
E-mail address: gokhanvkokturk@gmail.com
they look, what they desire to reach at, the possible ways in which they can reach to that, in other words, sociologists who have high level of awareness, they carry visual sociology at an important point within the discipline of sociology in point of (in terms of) understanding the language of culture and demonstrating the ability to interact with materials that reflect the characteristics of culture.

Until today, visual sociology studies mainly reflect an effort in the form of the critique of modernism and supporting the points of criticism by visual images. In recent years, possibilities (opportunities) offered by technological developments, visual dimension to the culture that we are a part of it have highly increased its volume and quality. In such a case, especially sociologists cannot be expected to remain indifferent.

To explain the culture requires first knowing the language of culture. According to sociological approach, if you know the language, then you will be able to tell the culture through texts and pictures. Culture is one of the most dynamic component of the social world we live in. While trying to post comments through photos, we realize that both elements of the photograph and the form of being taken photo, place and time are shaped by the culture.

When approaching a sociological perspective, we can view (display) the life that flow as instantaneous and evaluate it through photos. We sociologists concretize and can evaluate momentarily the life that flows within the discipline of sociology and the social word which surrounds us through photos. This snapshot includes the elements which is natural, we do not notice, can go into detail, and we can think and assess on it.

Photos are a good way of collecting qualitative data. They provide us the data which we cannot hear, see and notice. In addition, through photos we obtain the benefits of consolidating or making sense of the evidence and information that we acquire qualitative data by means of other techniques. Usually political and ideological assessments are carried out through photos, the best example of this, the events of September 11 and the photos which was taken when the USA brought democracy in Iraq set a good example (exemplify). In this regard, the point is that we can determine, we are surrounded by the social world which flow, often we do not feel, it is not change according to whether we are aware of, that we call life. The social world have a feature of being multi-dimensional, multi-layered and multi-variable characteristic. The social world we have mentioned can be analyzed as a near complete with an interdisciplinary approach. Not be able to make full analysis arise from (root in) the dynamic feature of the culture, so the language of culture and also assessments related to it have a temporary feature.

Visual sociology uses photography and video recording to access information and also communicate with (via) culture. It uses these techniques to be able to stop the life that flow for a moment and more importantly to be able to understand the language of culture. Especially in terms of sociology, photo is possible to evaluate complementary or reinforcing while collecting qualitative data through interviews.

According to Howard Becker, photography and sociology have emerged about the same time, that is in the mid 19th century. At the same time about this period is a time of intense effect of biological and social approaches to anthropology and human evolution. As a matter of fact as Harper pointed out, visual instruments at these early days of anthropology had used to classify societies on the basis of race theories. Even according to Becker, to collect visual data has become almost mandatory at anthropological field work.

Nevertheless, in the sociological approach, photograph is to be an important instrument to understand the language of culture arise from (root in) primarily some important features that photograph, which is a visual image, have. Namely, before anything else there is a secret magic of photography, to discover that is thanks to know how you will be able to make contact with photo. In addition, photograph presents the reality to us as a plane, in other words, photo is two-dimensional. Being offered the reality as a plane, visual assessment of the feature of capability of changing according to the culture, people, time,
space and the person who takes photo, provide ground. As a matter of fact, to illustrate this situation with the spread of different colors of light from prism make up (build, create) the most descriptive form of expression. Taking the reality, which the most noticeable quality of the photo, into a frame, it is accord with the goal of providing in-depth knowledge through qualitative data. In this regard, in the photograph we have seen is valid for this frame, for sure our interpretations or evaluations are limited with (bounded by) this frame. Being limited the photo with frame forces us to provide in-depth knowledge. At the same time, this feature is also an indication of not being sufficient alone for visual assessment of obtaining a qualitative data. To be able to concretize momentarily the social world that flows, is rooted in (stem from, originate in) the feature of stopping the time of the photo. Thus, it is possible for us to make a visual assessment.

Photo reveals oppositions, contradictions, contrasts and conflicts. From this aspect it provides opportunity of comparative evaluation, description and explanation. The feature which needs to be emphasized essentially, the photo presents a different perspective. In other words, the perspective of the photo is different from our perspective. Hence, our focus and photo’s are different. A photo never shows the world as we see. We can interpret the social world that surrounds us only with photo. Photo talks to us. Understanding how and in what way it speaks is directly related to predominantly the disciplines of communication, sociology and psychology.

Visual evaluation works within the scope of visual sociology have both theoretical and practical dimension. If we take the example of data collection through photography; interests, goals, knowledge, value patterns and readings before visual reviews constitute the first theoretical part of the assessment. The effect of large proportion of the first theoretical part and the process of taking photo constitute (form) an applied part and the interpretation of photo which is taken constitute (form) the second theoretical part. The second theoretical part just as the first theoretical part is shaped by interests, goals, knowledge, values which is possessed and readings.

In terms of content and meaning, visual sociology follows a research strategy that does not fit the principles of the methodology which means positivist, even its passion. With this aspect, to think of visual sociology contrary to the understanding of the positivist methodology, it can be seen synonymous with postmodernism which is captivated. However, to interpret visual sociology in this way “Visual sociology puts forward the visual dimension which neglected positivist methodology understanding” seems more meaningful. With the reason “Visual sociology began to arouse interest simultaneously with post-modernism”, when we evaluated it as one of data collection techniques which interpretivist paradigm proposed on the basis of understanding and interpretation, we also need to indicate that positivist paradigm has neglected the dimension of visual image. Otherwise, we participated in the call which simplifies the sociology as the form of generating words and make it unnecessary from place to place.

To understand the language of culture and try to evaluate the visual elements which is reflected in characteristics of culture, in other words, to study visual sociology, if it is taken in the framework of Popular Culture, becomes inevitable to consider the form of consuming the studies of visual sociology and after a certain period of time it will lose its effect.

Against the problem of the data obtained from visual sociology reviews and the information obtained through research techniques which are often referred to, become standard, familiar and plastic; the investigator has the functions of showing and reminding the fact, which is always an issue to be considered, that the individual which is a creative and active in the social world where (s)he lives. The meaning and content of visual sociology is perceived a very simple way. Visual sociology studies comes to mean to evaluate only concrete visual images, to neglect or exclude the social world in which we live and the culture which is an important dimension of it and most importantly the language of the culture, that is the assessment of visual sociology, because then our efforts to understand and interpret the social world go off at half cock.
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W.Lawrence NEUMAN
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