
Visualising and Knowing: the Photographer/Ethnographer and the Rhythms of Soho (London) in Times of Change

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Abstract

In this paper, I am presenting an audio-visual slideshow combining photographs and sounds of Soho (London). The slideshow is 4 minutes long and is complemented by a reflection on its composition and content. The photographs in this series were taken as part of a larger multi-sensory and multi-media ethnography of Soho and as a final project for an MA in Photography pursued in order to complement my academic practice.

Soho is undergoing a rapid process of sanitisation through a hegemonic form of gentrification (Sanders-McDonagh, Peyrefitte and Ryalls, 2016). Attentive to its different rhythms, I have photographed and recorded sounds at different times of day and night over two years. The combination of the two media responds to the necessity of investigating the rhythms of the city (Lefebvre, 2004) by moving through and sensing place (Lyon, 2016). The acts of photographing and recording sounds consolidate this embodied experience. Reflecting on my position as a photographer as well as an ethnographer in the field has been central in considering the phenomenological processes of knowing Soho as place as well as in engaging in a 'live sociology' (Back and Puwar, 2012).

In this exploration at the inter-disciplinary boundary of photography and ethnography, I have also paid particular attention to the lights of Soho (natural but mostly electric) as they reveal its multi-faceted nature in times of change. In this composition, the poetics of a place in flux are translated through a metaphorical use of light and by extension the reflection of light: the connected electric hues forming its pictorial syntax.

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