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Reconfiguring Visual Studies of Culture: Critical Issues and Ways to Overcome Them

This paper will discuss some specific issues that continue to challenge visual research (and ‘visual studies’ in a broader sense) as a practice. These issues, which can be turned into opportunities for advancement when dealt with appropriately, include: the need to develop more specific and more integrated visual competencies in order to be able to adequately deal with different aspects of the visual (mimetic and expressive properties), visual media types and languages, the multimodal interplay of expressive systems (visual and non-visual); the need to gain more control over the whole process of meaning-making and to develop optimal working relations with other visual professionals; the need for a further theoretical and methodological grounding of visual inquiry, including the customization of existing frameworks; the broadening of the field in terms of referents, media and types of representation; the pivotal but complex role of visual technology in addressing different research opportunities and particularly in developing a more expressive and proficient visual scientific language; the need to continue to entertain an open and critical view on the different possibilities and approaches of visual research so as not to disregard unique properties of the visual while at the same time not idealize certain potentialities; the need to deal more adequately (e.g. through better communication) with a number of external forces that continue to limit the execution and dissemination of visual research.