

An Impressionistic orientation towards visual inquiry into the conduct of everyday life

Authors: Darrin Hodgetts, Arley Andriolo, Otilie Stolte & Pita King

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Abstract

Increasingly qualitative research in psychology encompasses various visual materials. These are often analysed using existing qualitative approaches associated with analysing linguistic materials. In this reflexive article, we raise concerns regarding this proceduralized practice and present the conceptual groundwork for a flexible approach to visual inquiry that draws concepts and insights from the visual arts. The primary focus is on engaging with insights from Impressionism as a source of insight for a dynamic and subjective orientation towards visual inquiry and comprehension. To ground this orientation, we argue for the relevance of concepts (e.g., memesis, the flâneur, aesthetics) for efforts to extend visual inquiries into social psychology of everyday homelessness.

Visual research is now an established aspect of psychological research (Reavey, 2011, 2020), with various forms being legitimized as focal elements of qualitative scholarship (Andriolo, 2018; Forrester, 2000; Moliner, 2016; Przyborski & Slunecko, 2012; Verstegen, 2014). The research cannon includes studies of already formed images, such as cigarette warning labels (Haines-Saah., Bell & Dennis, 2015), embroidery (Segalo, 2018), Instagram posts (Marshall, Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2020), and historical photographs (Hakokongas & Sakki, 2016). Researchers also ask participants to picture aspects of their lifeworlds, such as stigma using photo-voice (Rusinova, Mizock & Bloch, 2018), homelessness using photo-elicitation

(Hodgetts et al., 2007), LGBTQ family life using interactive arts (Willes, Jagiello, Allen & Motel, 2019), embodied cognition using video (Gylfe, Franck, Lebaron & Mantere, 2015), self-portraits of early school leavers using pinboards (Mann & Warr, 2017), and various drawing and relational mapping techniques (Boden, Larkin & Lyer, 2019). Rapid development in this area is evident in a number of edited books (Flick, 2014; Reavey, 2011, 2020) and journal articles on how to employ existing qualitative methods to analyse visual materials. These include how to employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (Boden, Larkin & Lyer, 2019), conversation analysis (Smith, Mountain & Howkins, 2016), thematic analysis (Russinova, Mizock & Bloch, 2018; Willes, Jagiello, Allen & Motel, 2019), collective memory (Hakokongas & Sakki, 2016), and more broadly metaphor and montage (Mann & Warr, 2017).

Along with these efforts to make sense of visual artefacts, there has been a proliferation of attempts to establish 'rigor' in the analysis process through the imposition of what can be seen as off the shelf methods for producing 'reliable' results (*cf.*, Braun & Clark, 2013; Brinkman, 2014, 2015; Boden, Larkin & Lyer, 2019; Smith, Mountain & Howkins, 2016). Established methods of analysis that were initially developed as part of the qualitative turn in psychology, are now being set as a normative basis for assessing the quality and reliability of visual analyses. This is particularly evident in contemporary peer review processes and thesis marking where deviations from 'accepted' conventions can result in the rejection of a manuscript or a lower grade. There is considerable risk in simply applying the rules of highly proceduralized approaches that were developed to make sense of linguistic forms (Russinova, Mizock & Bloch, 2018; Smith, Mountain & Howkins, 2016). In particular, methods such as thematic, conversation and discourse analysis reflect the assumption that meanings are encoded into texts. Hence, an assumption is made that more reliable - perhaps even verifiable - readings can be gained through procedures featuring structured coding, matrixes, and even inter-coder reliability checks.

The trend towards highly structured approaches to analysis emerges, in much part, because of the appeal of ready-made ways into visual analysis that carry the illusion of certainty through procedure. We would argue that the assumptions in play in such approaches have more in common with the physical sciences than arts-informed approaches to knowledge production (Hodgetts et al., 2020; Willes et al., 2019; Chamberlain et al., 2018). Central is the idea that if one follows rigorous procedures that can be (at least in theory) subject to auditing, then one can be more confident in the quality of one's own and other people's analyses. As such, the auditing of procedures of analysis have become central to the governance of quality in analysis.

In writing this article, we seek to challenge the normalization of procedure driven approaches to coding and categorizing visual materials, and the associated fixation of what is evident

denotatively within the frame. In many respects, we agree with scholars such as Brinkman (2014, 2015) and Packer (2018) who argue for the need to develop less rule governed 'post-coding' approaches to generating knowledge with qualitative materials. It is not our contention that researchers should never code or inform their analyses with insights and techniques developed for making sense of linguistic materials. Rather, psychologists should not assume that practices, including coding are necessary or assume that the quality of a qualitative analysis is reliant on how clearly one outlines their coding procedures. We are not alone here. For some time, visual researchers have argued for the limitations of highly prescriptive and procedure-governed approaches to visual analysis (Pink, 2012). The proliferation of proceduralized approaches can detract from the development of further creative and artistic sense-making modes of inquiry that embrace the polysemic and relational nature of visual materials. This is important because pictures are aesthetic phenomena that are embroiled within social relations and often exhibit a memetic game where meanings come from both inside and outside the frame (Andriolo, 2018).

Central to our argument is the assertion that psychologists who engage in the proceduralized governing of analysis have opened up the potential for the establishment of a 'Salon' like approach to policing visual analyses. This development relates to attempts to discipline what techniques are acceptable in producing 'quality' knowledge and publications or items for exhibition. By way of background to this historical comparison, the Salon was initially a progressive institution established in France in 1667, which developed into one of the most important art exhibitions in Europe. For over 200 years, inclusion in the Salon became increasingly crucial for artists to succeed and gain royal favour. Once the Salon became established as the key site for assessing quality in art, it also became more prescriptive and orthodox. Over time, the Salon morphed into a conservative institution that policed set conventions right down to prescribing the use of particular brushstrokes. Meanwhile, new innovations were often deemed to not be of sufficient quality for exhibition. For example, the Impressionists challenged established painting styles with the development of a more contingent, less polished, prescribed and rougher style. Such 'unorthodox' submissions were generally rejected by the academic juries of the Salon due to their not following accepted conventions (Brauer, 2013).

In the current epoch, there are growing trends towards a more narrowly policed Salon in Qualitative Psychology. This development reflects the broader audit culture that now shapes knowledge production in the academy (Brinkman, 2015), and which is implicated in the establishment of criteria for regulating various scholarly activities in psychology (Parker, 2009). As Brinkman (2015, p.164) notes, "Bureaucracy is characterized by standardized procedures and methods, regulatory, formal rules...". Today, quality in qualitative research is increasingly

associated with calls to account for one's compliance with the prescriptive rules for coding and analysis. Similar governance of style/quality by the historical Salon led groups, such as the Impressionists, to establish various alternative exhibitions. Likewise, contemporary psychologists who do not embrace orthodox analytic approaches often turn to exhibiting their work in less rule-governed edited books, fringe journals in psychology, and/or less methodolitarized disciplines.

In order to extend current conversations in psychology with the arts, we offer insights from Impressionism as a particular movement concerned with exploring the fluidity of everyday life visually (*cf.*, Hodgetts et al., 2020). We argue that in order to embrace the dynamism of situated human experiences, as is often reflected in visual materials, psychologists should derive further lessons, concepts and insights from such approaches to the visual arts. This is necessary because the creation and interpretation of visual materials relies heavily on human subjectivity, intuition, sensibility, insight and creativity. As such, visual inquiry is by necessity a fundamentally artistic endeavour as much as a scientific enterprise. Although Impressionism had its heyday in the late 1800s, its emphasis on everyday life, transience, mobility, entanglement, perception, and human relations with the world seems particularly relevant given the challenges of contemporary times. Impressionism arose during a historical period of rapid change; hence, we can now extend on the ideas of the Impressionists to advance openness, creativity and inventiveness as we grapple today with new complexities and associated uncertainties.

Clearly, we are not the first psychologists to see value in drawing insights and concepts from the arts in extending knowledge within psychological science. For example, during the inception of the modern discipline Rivers (1867) conducted visual research into colour, space and perception, and his work was included in Sharpey-Schafer's (1898) seminal *Textbook of Physiology*. Goldie (2004) also reveals connections between the idea of deception in both conceptual art and social psychology. The former involves the deception of the viewer. The later involves the deception of participants in experiments. Additional important contributions have been offered by Frayze-Pereira (2006) who identified the conception of "silence" in body art, bringing together the silence of the spectator and Arendt's (1963) banality of evil. Another important example of the contribution of the arts to psychology can be found in phenomenology. When Merleau-Ponty (1945) wrote the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he referred to the post-impressionist painter Paul Cézanne who aided him in thinking through his own interpretation of perception. Cézanne's work was also a source of foundational insight within French phenomenology more generally. The series of paintings presenting different perspectives of the Mountain Saint Victoire offers one of the most powerful examples of how artists can teach researchers how to fine-tune their eyes (perceptions). Further, Williams (1954)

explored the historical connections between the emergence of modern subjectivism and the development of critical phenomenology. More recently, the use of arts-based approaches to extending knowledge production practices and to foster positive human relations and social change initiatives have re-surfaced in community (Sonn & Quayle, 2014) and critical psychologies (Chamberlain, McGuigan, Anstiss & Marshall, 2018). Renewed interest in these matters more generally is also evident in recent journal editorials where, for example, Pickering and Teo (2020) advocate for a 'psychological humanities'.

It is beyond the scope of this article to cover the wide-ranging ways in which ideas from the arts have been applied in psychological practice domains, including art therapy or in research beyond visual inquiry. We also do not offer a 'how-to-guide for Impressionistic analysis. What is offered instead is a provisional conceptual orientation towards visual comprehension and inquiry that can be reworked creatively by other scholars for the purposes of their own projects (*cf.*, Boden, Larkin Lyer, 2019; Pink, 2012). This orientation is by necessity open to revision and must remain responsive to the perspectives of other scholars and research participants who also seek to make sense of the everyday issues as these are refracted through the visual artefacts (Brinkman, 2015; Hodgetts et al., 2020). We recognize in Impressionism the importance of engagements with particular people (research participants), scenes, and issues as a basis for creating our own impressions of their situations (*cf.*, Miyahara, 2014). Following the early Impressionistic social psychologist Georg Simmel (1903/1997), we are also concerned with the mundane and roughness of everyday life and what it can tell us about broader social structures (Frisby, 1981). To demonstrate the potential of this approach, we provide an account of how we draw upon aspects of Impressionism and associated concepts from the visual arts more broadly to inform the study of everyday homelessness (*cf.*, Hodgetts et al., 2020).

A brief orientation to Impressionism in the arts and everyday research

The term Impressionism was initially used as an insult with reference to Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1863) paintings, which were denigrated as 'unfinished wallpaper'. Impressionism was subsequently claimed as a positive movement in the arts. There are many interpretations of the origins, focus and subsequent development of the Impressionist movement (Herbert, 1991). All refer to the relevance of visual experience and the creation of optical impressions of everyday scenes. At its core, Impressionism involves working to create impressions that refract aspects of the everyday lifeworlds with which the observer is engaged. Our own Impressionist approach to visual inquiry is in keeping with this aspect of the work of Monet, Renoir, and Pissarro who were also interested in picturing as a means of bringing the

dynamics, fluidity and ephemerality of everyday scenes to life. We also approach visual inquiry as an inter-subjective enterprise that takes us into the everyday realm of situated human relations and visualized experiences. Before we delve into our engagements with Impressionism in visual inquiry into everyday homelessness, let us briefly spend a little more time on this early movement in the arts in Europe.

The concentrated perceptions of scenes from everyday life that are observable in early Impressionism are the result of historical developments. The oral and tactile orientated perception of the European medieval period was transformed into the visual-orientated perception that pervaded the Modern period (Lowes, 1986). On the one hand, the perception of time as a linear succession of moments created a broader interest among artists and scientists in observing and understanding phenomena across time. This entanglement of movement, time and observation was at the heart of early Impressionism. European societies were experiencing a new rhythm of life during the 19th century, concerning the advances in art and technology. Railways and trains brought different perspectives of both space and time. Correspondingly, Impressionists aimed to observe the movement of things, in rural and urban places. We can find famous examples like the morphological studies conducted by the cloud paintings of John Constable. Claude Monnet's work offers another prominent example of the exercise of the eye to capture process in time across a series of paintings. In his travels, Monet would see and paint the *Portal of Rouen Cathedral* (Normandy, France). The result was a series of paintings, made between 1892 and 1893, where the changing movements of light and colour appear. Monet worked on these canvases in different times of the day that offered different space perspectives. More than a detailed depiction of the architecture, what draws the observer's attention in this series is the vivid register of changes in light, colours and contrasts throughout the day. Monet registered the movement of appearances during the passage of time to reflect the impermanence of the material world.

The historical context for the development of Impressionism is important because we reside in a different historical moment, but one that retains spurs from the past. This means we must take care with how we adapt an Impressionistic orientation towards the visual from another epoch and in relation to the structure of contemporary perception. The epoch of early Impressionism was one where the visual also became a key means of knowledge production in the sciences. The eye provided distance in perspective for a science seeking neutrality, and as such the eye was treated as different from the other senses through which proximity and direct touch (engagement) is needed (Novaes, 2010). To retain neutrality and objectivity, many scientists strove to keep some distance from, rather than immersing themselves within the phenomena they observed. Although this distancing perspective has come to also dominate much of contemporary psychological research, at the same time, the early Impressionist eye

sought to become closer to the phenomena as seen from a more proximal and subjective perspective. This is one proximal aspect of Impressionism that we seek to adopt in order to propose an orientation towards everyday life through which we can become closer to the social phenomena under investigation and to the perspectives of the human beings concerned.

Corresponding with the development of a more immersive way of seeing and picturing the world, early Impressionists were among the Nineteenth century artists who ventured out from the studio (read laboratory or office), walking over the cities or travelling to the countryside. Several of these artists purchased new residences where they could live a more frugal existence and be closer to the people of the countryside, for example. As an artist and political activist, Camille Pissarro immersed himself in village life, ate the same food and wore the same clothes of people of more modest means. Pissarro conversed with local people regarding his socialist ideas and their experiences, whilst creating visual depictions of their situations. As an aside, the political engagements among such artists was not univocal and some did not agree with Pissarro's socialist perspective. However, they shared a focus on observing everyday scenes from their own points of view (Puydebat, Théry, Waks, 1993) and in doing so proposed revisions to the well-established landscape painting genre of the time.

These artists also abandoned drawing as the inner structure of the painting itself, preferring to explore colour movements over white canvas, and looking at the light from which forms appear to the eye. They worked *sur le motif*, observing the light and tones on a sunny day or on a rainy day: the clouds; the smoke; the water, and so on. Their focus was on the movement of the eyes and the movement of the landscape through perception as they engaged in a dynamic and immersive process of painting based on colour vibrations and change (Serullaz, 1989). Like contemporary ethnographically-orientated researchers, these artistic observers of everyday life were themselves also in movement along with the phenomenon being observed, visiting different places, travelling around the countryside, comparing the same object of inquiry at different times of the day, and so forth.

We also embrace the Impressionists' orientation towards the dynamics of everyday life and, in particular, urban mobilities (Hodgetts et al., 2019). As researchers concerned with the conduct of everyday homelessness, we draw insights from the mobile gaze of the flâneur (Benjamin, 1969; House, 2004). This orientation involves working *with*¹ our participants' first-person perspectives that are also produced from the perspective of flânerie or mobile detectives strolling through, whilst reflecting on and picturing their everyday cityscapes

¹ We have italicized *with* in relation to our collaborations with research participants that contrast with dominant and more distant approaches to quantitative and qualitative research that involve doing research *on* people with little or even no direct interaction with them.

(Hodgetts et al., 2019). The mobile perspectives from which their pictures are produced invoke their presence and invite viewers to also position themselves as observers of the journey and depicted situational dynamics of everyday homelessness (Hodgetts et al., 2019). For example, Figure One features overt traces of participants as *flânerie* who take us as domiciled researchers on a tour of their own lifeworlds from their own perspectives. Overtly, these traces include a thumb over the top of the camera lens whilst one stroller traverses the streets, a sleeping setup with a squeegee for washing car windows left by a friend, a camera flash reflected in an image of friends drinking, and a urine stained mattress stood up to dry after a wet night. The pictures offer snippets of broader lives and ways of being that exist beyond the frame. These pictures offer anchor points for us to explore *with* these participants. As House (2004, p. 140) notes in relation to the work of the Impressionist painter Degas: “It is the *flâneur*-detective who is invoked here; his [sic] searching eye can find order and meaning in the seeming incoherence of the modern urban environment”.

[Insert Figure One here]

Building on these brief comments on Impressionism in the arts, we extend our focus below to consider further the implications of this orientation for visual research into the conduct of everyday homelessness in psychology and the social sciences. This focus is appropriate because efforts to attend to aesthetic experiential knowledge are central to scholarship on everyday life (*cf.*, Davis, 1973; Hodgetts et al., 2020; Miyahara, 2014). By engaging with past insights from Impressionism and the arts, we seek to gain further insights into the visual aspects of our efforts to work closely *with* homeless people to observe, understand and portray the dynamics of this pressing societal issue. The ideas developed in this manuscript have emerged from our ongoing research into the everyday conduct of homeless and precariat lifeworlds, which began in the UK in 2000 and continues in New Zealand and Brazil (Hodgetts et al., 2007, 2008, 2010, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2016). This research programme includes ethnographic, participatory and action-orientated work to foster collaboration and to advance understandings of, and supports for, people of more modest means. Techniques such as photo-elicitation and drawing exercises are utilized as ethno-methodological breaching tasks that enable participants to gain reflective distance from various aspects of their lives. The proximal and participative approach adopted also arises from a deep commitment to social justice and societal transformation that we all share, and which also reflects the precariat backgrounds of two of us that have left lasting impressions.

Participant picturing, dialogue and the memetic faculty

It is not our contention that homeless participants in our research picture what they see in the same style as classic Impressionist painters. Rather, the proximal creative process of looking at, reflecting on and visually invoking the lived dynamics of everyday life that our participants engage in *with* us resembles the general orientation of early Impressionists (*cf.*, House, 2004). Additionally, our Impressionistic approach to working with participants resembles the emphasis on spending time *with* people as a means of better understanding and picturing aspects of their everyday lives, predicaments, concerns and perspectives. Our focus here is on the communicative aspects of picturing as social aesthetic practice (*cf.*, Andriolo, 2014; 2018; House, 2004). In other words, we are interested in how researchers can make sense of the visual artefacts our participants create and employ as a basis for entering into dialogue with us regarding their experiences.

Our use of the concept of *mimesis* further exemplifies how theoretical concepts from the visual arts are invaluable in helping us understand the picturing process through which we engage our participants. From its very beginnings in Ancient Greece, *mimesis* was taken to encompass acts of representation, expression, imitation, mimicry, similarity, and creativity. Today, the concept is not restricted to imitation or the simple act of representation in the sense of the Classical arts. Accordingly, participant pictures do not simply represent a stable external reality or participant experience. Following Lima (2008), we propose that *mimesis* is fundamental to understanding participant pictures as inherently intersubjective, dialectical (*cf.*, Benjamin, 1933/1978) and embroiled in the relationship between participant creators and scholar receptors. Invoking a dialogical process of meaning making, *mimesis* now refers to the space between one human mind and another, and how picturing can be used to bridge this space and aid mutual comprehension (Andriolo, 2014; Puetz, 2002). The concept is foundational to our efforts to consider visual artefacts of everyday life as dynamic, evocative objects. Likewise, images that homeless research participants create can communicate to us aspects of what it is like to live as impoverished strangers in the midst of an affluent society (Hodgetts et al., 2011).

Walter Benjamin's (1933/1979) concept of the memetic faculty further reminds us that meaning is never simply encoded, stable or self-evident within visual artefacts of everyday life. Rather, pictures are polysemic and memetic objects that cannot be simply decoded to produce literal textual readings of the sort promoted by coding-based forms of analysis (*cf.*, Willes, Jagiello, Allen & Motel, 2019). It is necessary for us to enter into dialogue *with* research participants regarding their pictures, often by employing techniques such as photo-elicitation interviews (Hodgetts et al., 2007). Such dialogue is crucial in making sense of everyday life through participant pictures because the meanings of pictures are rarely self-evident or unchangeable, and stem from both within and beyond the frame (Mann & Warr, 2017).

Through picture-based dialogue, we are able to explore participant images in ways that carry further insights into their perspectives on homelessness in general, and specific places, events and experiences in particular. Likewise, in his notes on the arcade project (see Buck-Morss, 1991), Walter Benjamin also asserts the importance of annotated images as a means of delving into memetic processes that are central to visual comprehension.

Examples of the annotated visual artefacts we are engaging with include a homeless person creating a picture of a radio and book (see Figure Two, Hodgetts et al., 2010) in order to convey how he creates a mobile safe haven out of sound and imagination, which enables him to gain a sense of security when transiting an uncaring urban landscape. Another example is the picturing of a trip to the library (see Figure Three, Hodgetts et al., 2008), which offers an anchor point for us to consider issues around social and material exclusion. This picture opened up a conversation regarding the corresponding significance of this public institution for homeless people to spend the day inside engaged in mundane interactions with domiciled people. In annotating pictures produced by such participants with their own explanations of depicted objects, locations and relationships, Impressionistic inquiry is designed to invite readers to also adopt the scrutinizing perspective of the flâneur by proxy. Readers are invited to look from inside the frame outwards towards the broader psychological, relational and societal significance of visual artefacts.

[Insert Figure Two here]

[Insert Figure Three here]

Foundational to Impressionistic inquiry is the assertion that researchers cannot fully experience the world as homeless participants do or grasp the full 'meaning' of the pictures they produce. However, the inclusion of visual exercises in research that require us to dialogue *with* participants can provide us with a means to share aspects of, and insights into, personal experiences of homelessness. In this context, mimesis offers a basis for understanding the limitations and contingent nature of the interpretations or impressions we create through our interactions *with* participants. That said, we still seek to avoid the perils of relativism, or the proposition that participant pictures are simply social constructions with no relationship to the world beyond the frame. Mimesis allows us to embrace the stance that each participant picture carries a denotative relationship to external places, situations and persons, and a connotative relationship to broader intergroup relations, social structures, ideologies and inequalities that also populate local scenes (Barthes, 1977). Our participants do not have to depict domiciled people denotatively or explicitly within the frame in order to invoke them connotatively. By depicting a library entrance, research participants are aided in considering *with* us the mundane interactions that occur beyond the frame in this public space.

Through the joint engagements of participants and researchers *with* pictures, we can readily recognize and discuss particular places, gestures or situations at a denotative level. We can also begin deliberating upon the connotative significance of visual artefacts for understanding participant experiences of homelessness. As such, the meaning of participant pictures, as memetic artefacts, can be extended further and morphed through dialogue, rather than being readily readable from within the frame of particular pictures or picture sets. In this sense, still photographs are not as stable as they might appear on the surface (Hodgetts et al., 2007). The perspectives homeless people try to convey imperfectly and contingently through the creation of visual artefacts are alive, dynamic and open to further metamorphosis as memetic objects.

Through engagements *with* participants and their pictures, we are typically taken on tours of the particular places, situations, events and relationships that speak mimetically to different aspects of their everyday lives. Through these tours, participants show and tell us about their situations and bring us closer to witnessing homelessness from perspectives of the people living it (Hodgetts et al., 2007; Lima, 1981). Relevant here is the triangular relationship that has been employed in the psychology of the arts as a means of enriching understandings of basic elements in visual comprehension (Frayze-Pereira, 2006). This triangular relationship includes first the homeless person who produced the picture, second the researcher seeking understanding, and third in between these is the picture itself as a mimetic object. As a relational process, picturing points to the relevance of comprehension and meaning making that comes with each of these three elements and in how they relate to one another. These are not separable parts of the whole. It is through the interrelationship of all three that the meanings of pictures are negotiated memetically and interactively, and can be interpreted tentatively (Andriolo, 2018).

Foundational to the Impressionistic approach is the realization that what is pictured is not the experience of the participant in any pure form and cannot be read as such. Rather, it is a constructed and representational metamorphosis (Gadamer, 1992) that can be expanded further dialogically through the use of techniques such as photo-elicitation interviews. Correspondingly, it is important to note that, pictures created and shared through visual inquiry invoke a social aesthetic process that allows us to span some of the distance in perspective between different groups of people. As domiciled scholars, we sought further insight into marginalized and often misrepresented lives with a view to helping (Andriolo, 2018; Hodgetts et al., 2020). We can come to see aspects of participant perspectives a little more clearly through sharing in the interpretation of pictures (Lima, 2008). However, no matter how empathetic this exchange becomes, we can never know or feel the horrors of homelessness as they do (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

The emphasis we place on the relational aspects of working *with* participants and their pictures corresponds with the importance we assign to embracing the intimate perspectives and experiential elements that come into play in visual inquiry. Arts-derived concepts such as mimesis remind us that we are dealing with sentient human beings who are trying to make sense of and communicate experiences and ways of knowing and doing everyday life that are often hard to convey linguistically, but which can be shown and discussed more readily (Hodgetts et al., 2007). Through our engagements, we have come to see how, for homeless participants there is no rational explanation for their often harrowing and emotionally filled experiences of adversity and exclusion. It just hurts, unnerves, wounds, scares, scars and is hard to convey. However, by picturing aspects of their lives and discussing these with us, homeless people can articulate their situations and needs a little more openly (Hodgetts et al., 2008, 2010). They can render that which is difficult and unsayable somewhat more visible, tangible, tactile and communicable (*cf.*, Boden, Larkin & Lyer, 2019).

Looking out beyond the frame into everyday homelessness in an inequitable society

As will be evident from the previous section, Impressionistic inquiry does not remain fixated with what is shown denotatively within the frame. This mode of visual inquiry also involves moving out from engagements with the denotative features of local scenes to the connotative meanings that are associated with the societal structures and practices that lie beyond the frame. As such, our orientation to visual comprehension is well suited to social psychological research into the conduct of everyday life (Højholt, & Schraube, 2015; Holzkamp, 1995/2016). Like early Impressionists, scholars in this area of social psychology also seek to create perspectives on everyday events and relationships within the context of broader societal structures and transformations (House, 2004). This tradition was initiated by Holzkamp (1995/2016) as a means of bridging the gulf in psychological research between the personal (local) and societal (general) levels of human existence. A key focus is on how people work in concert to [re]produce local ways of being and, in doing so, contribute to the broader reproduction of the social milieu within which they are engulfed (Schraube & Højholt, 2020).

Whilst sympathetic to this overall orientation towards the dynamics of conduct of everyday life, Teo (2017) has rightly pointed out that scholarship in this domain does not have a single core theoretical orientation. We see this as a strength, rather than a limitation of the orientation. The dynamic complexities of everyday life often require scholars to act eclectically as *bricoleur* (Lévi-Strauss, 1962), and to employ various concepts with the necessary flexibility to facilitate our efforts to make sense of different aspects of participant predicaments and experiences (Hodgetts et al., 2019). For us, the conduct of everyday life offers a rallying point for engaging

in visual inquiries into the lived experiences of groups, including homeless people who are often written out of history, and in order to understand the functioning of broader societal relations in their everyday lives (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

Exploring visual artefacts *with* participants invokes the importance of human relations in how we understand and address homelessness as fundamentally being a product of dysfunctional intergroup relations and societal inequities, rather than individuals (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). As such, our Impressionistic comprehension of situations moves out conceptually in broad brushstrokes from the visual artefacts our participants create and discuss *with* us to the broader inequitable society at play. Pictures of local places and practices, including access to the library (Figure 2) or efforts to transit the city safely within the sound bubble created by one's mobile device (Figure 3) by necessity must be extended out to the reproduction of broader social structures. The logical necessity of this interpretative shift can be understood in relation to Simmel's (1910/1978, p. 99) concept of the micro society whereby society is conceived of as, "...a structure that transcends the individual, but that is not abstract. Historical life thus escapes the alternative of taking place either in individuals or in abstract generalities. Society is the universal which, at the same time, is concretely alive". Asserting that the specific resembles the general, but is not reducible to it, Simmel (Simmel, 1903/1997) also explored urban life from the proximal perspective of an Impressionist, and in an effort to extract general arguments out of detailed considerations of local scenes. The concept of the micro society aids us in rupturing conventional boundaries in social psychology between the picture and the outside world or the local and general levels of human existence. This concept compels us to reach out interpretatively beyond the visual artefacts with which we are engaged in making sense of homelessness. As such, the micro-society orientation allows us to more fully contextualize issues such as homelessness as societal, rather than simply individual phenomena. This is important for avoiding the reproduction of epistemological violence associated with psychological research that individualizes experiences of poverty, inequality, and homelessness (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

Building on the work of scholars such as Simmel and Holzkamp, our understanding of participant depictions of everyday scenes and experiences does not require a choice between the particular/personal and the general/abstract. After all, both are entangled in each other and kept concretely alive through the visual artefacts that participants create and discuss *with* us (Hodgetts et al., 2019, 2020). The sociologist Miyahara (2014) also draws on the concept of micro society to argue that societal structures come into being and are reproduced with all their inequities through everyday social interactions and associated aesthetic practices (Andriolo, 2018, 2020). We share with Simmel and Miyahara a focus on everyday aesthetic artefacts, as a foundation for exploring how broader social structures inhabit and shape local

lives (Davis, 1973). This orientation enables us to move as Impressionists out beyond everyday experiences of hardship and into consideration of the ways in which broader societal formations drive adversity (House, 2004). It attunes us to approaching visual materials as artefacts of societies and cultures, rather than simply as self-constrained texts that can simply be coded denotatively and read locally within the frame.

The Impressionist perspective we adopt at this time also speaks to the value of visual inquiry in bridging the gap between detailed empirical engagements with actual everyday lives and philosophical abstractions (Hodgetts et al., 2019). Thus, in comprehending visual artefacts we move constantly between the specific picture and theoretical concepts as sources of insight for cracking pictures open further. Self-positioning as the scholarly bricoleur (Lévi-Strauss, 1962) enables us to bring together insights generated through our interactions *with* research participants and their pictures, with our own fieldwork experiences, and with insights from theory and research literatures to create in-depth and dynamic impressions of everyday homelessness. The resulting impressions or interpretations constitute intensified versions of homelessness as a social phenomenon populated by socio-economically immersed and dynamically engaged urban strangers (Hodgetts et al., 2011). These impressions are neither solely a literal reading of pictures nor inferences that draw from our existing knowledge of homelessness. These impressions are dialectical, multivocal and open to further interpretation (*cf.*, Hakokongas & Sakki, 2016).

Final thoughts

The primary intent of this article was to articulate some of the conceptual groundwork for an Impressionistic orientation towards visual inquiry in psychological research into the conduct of everyday life. In contrast to approaches such as thematic or conversation analysis, our Impressionistic orientation is less procedurally orientated. We are not arguing that more procedurally governed guides to analysing qualitative materials are wrong, or that researchers should not use common techniques, such as coding or matrices in their analytic processes. Our argument is that psychologists can also engage with visual materials in more open-ended, contingent and dynamic ways that draw further insights from the visual arts. What we are inferring is the Aristotelian distinction between *technê* and *phronesis*. The former refers to the emphasis on methods from a technical or physical science orientation, while the latter is associated with wisdom, intuition and insight in knowledge production. Extending beyond the current preoccupation with *technê* is important for enhancing visual comprehension in social psychological research into the conduct of everyday life (Hodgetts et al., 2020), and perhaps other domains of scholarship as well. We have much to learn from the visual arts in terms of

how to understand the materials we are working with and attune our perspectives to the complexities that come with the interpretation of visual artefacts.

Relatedly, sharp distinctions between scientific and artistic approaches to knowledge production in psychology that emerged during the modern epoch are problematic. These distinctions can lead to a narrowing of what is acceptable or even considered 'reliable' in terms of visual inquiry. As Jones & Galison (1998, p.1) remind us, "Analytic attempts to distinguish "art" and "science" often founder at the boundaries drawn between them". For some time a minority of scholars have sought to span science and the arts (Frayze-Pereira, 2006; Simmel, 1903, 1908; Rivers, 1897; Williams, 1954). Further questions have also been raised recently regarding what counts as legitimate research and practice among psychologists engaged in critical and community explorations of the arts in psychology (Chamberlain et al., 2018; Pickering & Teo 2020; Sonn & Quayle, 2014). We offer our orientation towards Impressionistic inquiry as an iterative, imaginative and incomplete contribution to such ongoing discussions.

The Impressionistic orientation that we have conceptualized here also responds to recent calls in qualitative psychology for more flexible and 'abductive' orientations to analysis that include the positioning of the researcher as bricoleur who is open to stumbling across unanticipated participant experiences and situations (Brinkmann, 2014). Impressionistic inquiring is attuned to exploring aspects of everyday life that research participants bring to our attention, often visually, in ways that we had not anticipated in the design and commencement of our inquiries. As Brinkmann (2014, p. 724) proposes, "The arts, using fiction, the counter-factual, and thought experiments, can often give us the estranging sensitivity that is necessary to experience a breakdown in understanding". Such breakdowns are crucial for de-familiarizing societal issues such as homelessness and developing understandings that are more in keeping with the perspectives of the people impacted, and that are more responsive to their actual needs (Hodgetts et al., 2020). The flexible orientation we advocate also has a parallel history in the phenomenological movement (Andriolo, 2020). As Geiger (1958) notes, the essence of knowledge can be achieved, not only by deduction or induction, but rather by intuition, experience and dialogue. Such intuition is foundational to the impressions we create though working *with* research participants and the memetic visual artefacts they create to communicate *with* us.

We have focused on everyday experiences of homelessness to exemplify our Impressionistic orientation because homeless people are among the most marginalized and poorly understood groups in society. Homeless people are often only experienced by members of domiciled groups in passing as they navigate the city. Homeless people are also often held at considerable social distance from domiciled passers-by (Hodgetts et al., 2011). Engaging

homeless people in picturing processes enables them to step back somewhat from, and reconsider their situations and relationships to the domiciled in ways that often invoke unanticipated complexities and relationships. They are also aided visually in doing so in ways that are a little more understandable and familiar to us as domiciled researchers (*cf.*, Bond, Larkin & Lyer, 2019; Hodgetts, Radley & Chamberlain, 2007). The annotated pictures these participants create *with* us have also proved invaluable in efforts to lobby decision-makers to resource humane responses to homelessness as a pressing societal concern. Visual research artefacts enable us to span some of the social distance between homeless and domiciled groups and to challenge the domiciled sensibilities of decision makers by showing and reminding them of the humanity of homeless people (Hodgetts et al., 2020).

It is important that our interpretive gaze does not remain fixated on what is denotatively evident within the frame of particular pictures because the connotative level of meaning is rarely self-evident (Mann & Warr, 2017). Our interpretive gaze must shift in dialogue *with* our participants and theoretical abstractions (Simmel, 1908) out beyond the frame or picture (Davis, 1973). In this way, we approach participant pictures as artefacts of everyday life that are shaped by the 'invisible hand' of broader socio-political relations, structures and contexts. In making this expansive shift in focus from the intimate, local and denotative to the general and connotative, we follow the Impressionist emphasis on how common symbols evident in pictures (e.g., a damp and stained mattress) signify societal inequalities (e.g., a lack of investment in social housing or sustainable livelihoods) (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Through such interpretive shifts, participant pictures are positioned as launching pads for developing impressions of the societal processes at play both within the frame and beyond. Following Simmel (1980), the point of Impressionistic inquiry is to assemble a series of fleeting glimpses or depictions of everyday life *with* our participants (*cf.*, Frisby, 1981), and to employ these as anchor points for the construction of impressions of aspects of the larger societal totality to which the scenes depicted belong.

Finally, Impressionistic inquiry resonates with social psychological scholarship on the conduct of everyday life, which asserts that human experience and action exists simultaneously in both personal and collective (read societal) life (Højholt & Schraube, 2020). Human beings and the objects they create are approached as bearers of shared cultures and societies, which are reproduced through everyday social practices and interactions (Simmel, 1907/1978). It is a function of Impressionistic inquiry to investigate these person-society links and to develop impressions of the underlying societal significance of localized manifestations of broader social relations. In this regard, we share with early Impressionists (House, 2004) a focus on how pictures can generate insights into social, psychological and political aspects of everyday life in inequitable societies. In terms of considering the quality of impressionistic inquiry it is

again useful to draw insights from the visual arts. The products of such inquiry should demonstrate verisimilitude or appear plausible and useful in conveying to readers what it could be like to be homeless, and in opening up these lifeworlds for further reflection and action. Our impressions should convey a plausible semblance to experiences of homelessness that draws readers into this phenomenon in ways that resonate with what it is like for actual homeless people.

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