

## Doing Photo-elicitation in prison ethnography: unpacking prison officers use of force

Luigi Gariglio (University of Milan)

Since the *English Prison Today* was published in 1922, research on British prisons is occasionally illustrated with photographs. Yet, rarely, have visual methods been used critically in (prison) ethnography (Wagner 1979; Margolis and Pawels 2011); image-making and images themselves have been used illustratively rather than as constitutive sites of knowledge production (Sekula 1975; Tagg 1988) and, therefore, as objects to be interrogated in their own right by the researcher through, for example, participant collaboration. This paper reflects on the pros and cons of integrating visual methods into (prison) ethnography—an issue that is gaining more consideration, such as through the ESRC-funded Visual Criminology Seminar Series ([www.visualcriminology.com](http://www.visualcriminology.com)). In particular, it focuses on the use of ‘photo-elicitation’ interviewing (Collier and Collier 1967; Harper 2002; Gariglio 2010, 2015; Lapenta 2011) as a means to unpack the officers' use of force on the wing (Kauffman 1988). It interprets three theoretical terms: *visuality* (Rose 2014; Mirzoeff 2011; Sturken and Cartwright 2009; also see Schept 2014), *denotation* and *connotation* (Barthes 1977). The discussion is based on an ethnography conducted inside an Italian custodial-complex that hosts both a forensic psychiatric hospital and a prison. Prison officers, psychiatric staff and prisoners were invited to discuss a number of images produced by the researcher during the ethnography representing, among other subjects, the use of force and violence, thereby helping the researcher to address one crucial dimension of both doing prison work and incarceration that is often denied (Cohen 2001; Cohen and Taylor 1972) and at the same time giving participants a voice.



*Image 1. A prison officer on the wing (detail) © Luigi Gariglio*



*Image 2. A prison officer after an assault (detail) © Luigi Gariglio*



*Image 3. A constraint bed (detail) © Luigi Gariglio*

### ***References***

Collier, J. and Collier, M. (1967) *Visual Anthropology. Photography as a Research Method*, Albuquerque:

University of New Mexico Press.

Cohen S. (2001) *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Cambridge: Polity.

Cohen S. and L. Taylor (1972) *Psychological Survival: Experience of Long Term Imprisonment*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gariglio, L. (2015) 'Photo-elicitation in Prison: Visual Methods and Visual Culture'. Available at: <http://bordercriminologies.law.ox.ac.uk/photo-elicitation-in-prison/> (Accessed [15-07-2015]).

Gariglio, L. (2010) 'I visual studies e gli usi sociali della fotografia' in: *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*, 1: 117–140.

Harper, D. A. (2002) 'Talking about pictures: A case for Photoelicitation' in *Visual Studies*, 17 (1): 13–26.

Kauffman K. (1988) *Prison officers and their world*, London: Harvard Universities Press.

Lapenta F. (2011) 'Some Theoretical and Methodological Views on Photo-Elicitation', in Margolis and Powel (2011): 201–214.

Margolis, E. and Pawels, L. (2011) *The Sage Handbook for Visual Research Methods*, London: Sage.

Mirzoeff, N. (2011) 'The Right to Look' in *Critical Inquiry*, 37 (3): 473–496

Schept, J. (2014) '(Un)seeing like a prison: Counter-visual Ethnography of the Carceral State' in *Theoretical Criminology*, 18(2): 198–223.

Sekula, A. (1975) 'On the Invention of Photographic Meaning' in Burgin V., ed. (1982) *Thinking Photography*, Basingstoke, Palgrave: 84–109.

Sturken, M. e Cartwright, L. (2009) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tagg, J. (1988) 'Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State', in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photography and Histories*, London, Macmillan: 60–65.

Wagner, J., ed. (1979), *Images of Information: Still Photography in the Social Sciences*, London: Sage.