Prof. Zamorano and Prof. Ashley
LBST 330

Desiree-Maxine Schmitt
October 5, 2018

Response Paper #1 to Chapter 1 Ways of Seeing

The use of different forms of sampled data in research present the opportunity for different perspectives, different *ways of seeing* – the essence of interdisciplinarity. However, these different perspectives can also present various challenges. For example, all researchers are foremost individuals. Because of this, it is impossible to approach research without individual biases. In this way, data produced from research can become convoluted in our own biases and assumptions. Using data sources produced with a lack of neutrality can majorly influence the research it is applied to. However, when multiple different data sources are used and applied to research, this bias and lack of neutrality is decreased.

For my first Tutorial idea, I discussed looking at women in the Downtown Eastside to learn about the general demographics of women in this area. Because the women of the DTES are a vulnerable group, understanding the situational context of these women requires an emotionally sensitive approach. This lies in stark contrast to the necessity of a researcher of maintaining neutrality. It is then clear that this topic requires a unique research method – a unique *way of seeing*. Data samples for this tutorial might include the analysis of photographs, referencing demographic charts and graphs, and reviewing academic journal articles.

Incorporating photographs as data sources is integral to a research topic where the intended result is understanding human experiences. Berger writes:

> "No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times. In this respect images are more precise and richer than literature."

Photographs provide the opportunity to experience vignettes into someone else's life and perspective – of the individuals photographed, and of the photographer. However, these data sources offer perspectives that can be laden with the bias of the photographer. Because there exists an intentionality behind why the image was produced, as well as what we are using it for, photographs are not neutral data sources. This lack of neutrality can cause problems in producing accurate research results.

The use of charted and or graphed statistics in my research might also prove to be problematic. All statistics are created to serve a specific agenda. For example, statistics produced by the government about this demographic might serve one agenda, while statistics produced by non-profit organizations might server another. As well, individual connotations might exist in the way these statistics are displayed and presented. This agenda influences both the research behind the statistics in question, as well as the application of these statistics. Similar to the not-so-neutral nature of photographs, the intentionality behind why charts are produced and what we are using the charts for lessen this data source's neutrality.

Reality is changed by the methods with which we use to inspect reality – "*where* and *when* we see something will affect *what* we see." As Berger notes, it is imperative in research to prevent *mystification*, or, "the process of explaining away what might otherwise be evident." It will be integral to my research on women of the DTES that I approach both data sources and my own methods of selecting these data sources with the recognition that they are laden with biases and assumptions. It will serve my research to remember that "the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled."