

## Configuring Light: Staging the Social Project

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<http://chawedrosin.wordpress.com/2008/05/26/light-pollution-tenerife-canary-islands/>

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Project Website: <http://www.configuringlight.org/#>

Light has been largely invisible in social sciences. Although there are established research agendas on vision and visual culture, light itself – as material culture, as infrastructure, as a physical feature of social landscapes – has virtually no literature. Conversely, the largely technical literatures on light in architecture, design and energy studies make sociological assumptions that do not connect to the social science approaches that could help make sense of light as lived practices and understandings (eg, material culture studies, science and technology studies, consumption studies). Configuring Light/Staging the Social aims to forge an integral dialogue between social sciences, design, architecture and urban planning focused on one of the most fundamental features of social life. As the programme title indicates, we are concerned with light as

a material thing which is shaped or configured into specific social forms, and which enters into the ways in which social life and interaction is staged and enacted in specific social worlds.

Our aim is to produce both knowledges and methodologies for better researching the ways in which light is configured and the roles it plays in structuring social life. In pursuing this aim, our perspective is ethnographically comprehensive: we want to map all the significant forms of knowledge, practice and governance and all the actors (consumers, designers, planners) that enter into the processes of configuring light and staging social life. We anticipate that the practical and user significance of this research programme could be both large and – at the outset – unpredictable.

Our own expectations are twofold: • Light consumption has a greater impact on energy use than any other single social practice; changes in light use stemming from new knowledges and methodologies can make a huge environmental and economic contribution. • Light, as a fundamental feature of social life and of design, provides grounds for deeper methodological integration between social sciences and design disciplines, with possibilities of dramatic changes of practice on both sides of this divide.

Configuring Light/Staging the Social is a research agenda rather than a single research project. The aim is to develop, over the course of the next year, a limited number of pilot projects into a coherent programme. We have identified four focuses for research development:

**1. Configuring light:** designing, planning, staging Case studies (retrospective interviews and/or ethnographic observation) of strategically selected design and planning processes: architecture, industrial design, retail design, urban planning. What knowledges of light enter into these practices and how are they generated? What are the assumptions and beliefs about light and the social? How is light acted upon, configured, regulated, articulated, planned, represented in these practices?

**2. Consuming light:** Ethnographic work with ‘consumers’ of light, aiming to articulate the generally unspoken experiences and understandings of light in a range of social practices. Piloting will take the form of ‘walkabouts’ in selected environments - eg, homes, hotels, retail spaces, public spaces.

**3. Histories of light:** How do conventions and standards of light use emerge and stabilize over time? How are they relayed between different social domains (eg, visual, culture, design, law, policing)? How can architects and planners connect to histories and genealogies of light?

**4. Different lights:** Cross cultural comparative studies of meanings and uses of light focusing on culturally embedded understandings of light in diverse contexts (Africa, India, Asia, Latin America), and their impact on contemporary spatial organization, design and energy use.

In the first phase, this focus would involve interviews with anthropologists, designers, architects and development workers with specific expertise in selected regions. Configuring Light/Staging the Social has recently launched an international seminar series in order to develop an international platform for practitioners and academics in order to cross boundaries between social sciences, humanities, architecture and technology and develop new concepts, methods and information to understand light as material culture. Confirmed speakers of the seminar series include professionals and academics from Qatar, New Zealand, USA, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom.

### **Configuring Light/Staging the Social – The Team**

**Dr. Don Slater** Associate Professor (Reader) Department of Sociology Editor-in-Chief, British Journal of Sociology London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE [d.slater@lse.ac.uk](mailto:d.slater@lse.ac.uk) Tel +44 (020) 7849 4653 Don Slater researches and writes extensively on the sociology of economic life (consumption, consumer culture and marketing); new media and digital culture (ethnographies of media and development in the Caribbean, South Asia, West Africa and Latin America); and visual and material culture (photography, visual methods, fashion, community media). Major publications include: *New Media, Development and Globalization* (Forthcoming 2013); *The Technological Economy* (2005, with Andrew Barry); *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach* (2000, with Daniel Miller); *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (1997). He is also editor-in-chief of the *British Journal of Sociology*.

**Dr. Joanne Entwistle** Senior Lecturer, Culture, Media and Creative Industries Culture, Media and Creative Industries (CMCI) Deputy Dean, School of Arts and Humanities King's College London 339 Norfolk Building/Strand Campus, London, WC2R 2LS [joanne.entwistle@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:joanne.entwistle@kcl.ac.uk) Tel +44 (0)20 7848 1504 Joanne Entwistle has published extensively on the sociology of fashion and dress, the sociology of body, aesthetic markets and aesthetic economy. Her major publications include: *Fashioning Models: Image, Text, Industry*, co-edited with Elizabeth Wissinger (Berg, forthcoming); *The Aesthetic Economy: markets and value in clothing and modelling* (Berg, 2009); *Body Dressing*, co-edited with Elizabeth Wilson (Berg, 2001); *The Fashioned Body: fashion, dress and modern social theory* (Polity, 2000). She has published widely in a social sciences journals, including *Sociology*, *Sociological Review*, *Current Sociology*.

**Mona Sloane** Project Administrator PhD Student Sociology Department London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE [m.sloane@lse.ac.uk](mailto:m.sloane@lse.ac.uk) +44(0)7547 212 230 Mona Sloane's research interests largely evolve around the sociology of design as well as material culture (design practices, architectural planning, materialities in design processes, material knowledges), spatial atmospheres (Gernot Böhme, Peter Zumthor), aesthetics (perception theory, aesthetic economy, urban aesthetics), Actor-Network Theory (Bruno Latour, Albena Yaneva), media theory (Marshall McLuhan, Fritz Heider, Dirk Baecker) and dance studies (specifically the works of William Forsythe) and unconventional qualitative research methods. She holds an MSc in Sociology from the London School of Economics and Political Science, where she

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