

Looking into the outside

Reflections on social and visual affects
of windows in Bertinoro

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IVSA workshop theme

How social life is affected by structural oppositions such as day-night; inside-outside; acceptable-unacceptable.

What do these oppositions look like?

Statement of intention

This photo essay offers a visual account of the social affects of Bertinoro's windows - a medieval Italian village where I spent six days attending a visual sociology workshop in June 2006.

My background in art, photography and social science shapes this essay as a subjective reflection on the experience of being a foreigner, and thus outsider, in Italy.

Epistemologically, these photographs portray a process of developing knowledge, visually, about the way people dwell in the centre of a town of medieval origins. It explores how they manage and communicate the divisions between private and public, inside and outside, through the exterior presentation and 'public face' of the windows, which grace their buildings, houses and homes.

Conceptually, this sequence of photographs also explores the permeability between the artistic and the mundane, the expressive and the functional, the social and the individual, exclusion and inclusion.



In the discourses of contemporary society the term 'windows' has many meanings and many functions - facilitating the movement of light, sound and air, mediating verbal and visual exchanges, offering a portal on the virtual world.

Windows are fixed, yet permeable boundaries demarcating specific spaces and defining the relationship of individuals to that space.



Renaissance painters, inspired by the visual power of linear perspective believed that paintings should be 'windows on the world'.

This ocular logic later informed the visual order of the photograph.

Might this 'view' be inverted? Can photographs of windows be seen as paintings?



Some windows guard uninhabited spaces,
the interior disorder breaking out through
paneless frames.



Caged interiors, imprisoned plants curiously entreat the outsider to look, to enjoy what they see, to experience an almost hostile hospitality.



Grilled, blinded, functional windows, closed off to light and air, paradoxically offer tentative invitations to written communication.



Mirrored windows draw the outside in, only to reflect the world back at itself, destabilising the viewer, reinforcing their sense of exclusion.



At last, the screen opens, a barrier is removed. A smiling face, a friendly gesture invites social connection through a photographic exchange.