VISUAL AND MULTIMODAL URBAN SOCIOLOGY, PART B

Exploring the Urban Everyday

Edited by Luc Pauwels

RESEARCH IN
URBAN SOCIOLOGY

VOLUME 18B

VISUAL AND MULTIMODAL URBAN SOCIOLOGY, PART B

RESEARCH IN URBAN SOCIOLOGY

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RESEARCH IN URBAN SOCIOLOGY VOLUME 18B

VISUAL AND MULTIMODAL URBAN SOCIOLOGY, PART B: EXPLORING THE URBAN EVERYDAY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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David Schalliol is an Associate Professor of Sociology at St. Olaf College who is interested in the relationship between community, social structure, and place. He exhibits widely, including in the Chicago Architecture Biennial, the Centre Régional de la Photographie Hauts-de-France, and the Museum of Contemporary Photography. His work has been supported by institutions including the Graham Foundation and the European Union and featured in publications including *MAS Context*, *The New York Times*, and *Social Science Research*. David is the author of *Isolated Building Studies* (UTAKATADO) and co-author, with Michael Carriere, of *The City Creative: The Rise of Urban Placemaking in Contemporary America* (The University of Chicago Press). He additionally contributes to such films as *Almost There* (Kartemquin Films) and *Highrise: Out*

My Window (National Film Board of Canada), which won an International Digital Emmy for Non-Fiction. His directorial debut, *The Area,* premiered at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival and has aired on *America Reframed* and PBS.org. David earned his BA from Kenyon College and his MA and PhD from The University of Chicago.

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INTRODUCTION TO "VISUAL AND MULTIMODAL URBAN SOCIOLOGY, PART B: EXPLORING THE URBAN EVERYDAY"

Luc Pauwels

Volume 18B in the *Research in Urban Sociology* series is the second part of a cross-disciplinary exploration of a more visual and multimodal urban sociology. The double volume 18A and 18B explores cross-disciplinary ways in which the city and city life may be approached, studied, and expressed through visual and multimodal means and methods, thereby as much as possible including sensory experiences other than those related to seeing and hearing.

1. LOOKING BACK AT PART A: IMAGINING THE SENSORY CITY

The first part of *Visual and Multimodal Urban Sociology* (Volume 18A of the *Research in Urban Sociology* series) sets the scene for both volumes and focuses on ways and technologies to interrogate and relive the urban past as well as to navigate the present. A brief synopsis of these preceding chapters may offer the reader of this second volume an idea of what is covered in the first part of this double volume.

The first chapter of Volume 18A titled "Viewing and Sensing the City: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives, Methods, and Technologies" by Luc Pauwels discusses the thematic focus of the two new volumes as well as their grounding in different established and emerging disciplines and traditions. It does so by elaborating on the differences and interconnections of visual sociology and urban sociology in their quest to understand human settlements, and it argues for expanding the focus to other disciplines that are equally geared toward

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researching aspects of the city in visual and multimodal ways. The second chapter, "Imagining the City as Home: Functional prerequisites and moral challenges" by John Grady, then presents a substantial treatise about what defines a city and how to approach this visually. It provides a comprehensive framework for looking at various aspects and prerequisites of cities as core human settlements. The third chapter "Unpacking Urban Life in the Past. 'Time Machine' as a Data Visualization and Analysis Tool," by Danielle van den Heuvel and Julia Noordegraaf, presents the "Time Machine," an unmatched repository of information and a remarkably advanced visualization tool to investigate different interconnected aspects of urban life in their visual and spatial context. The fourth chapter, "Georeferencing Early Photographic Studios and Using Historic Photographs to Study Urban Processes and Environments," by Jeremy Rowe, provides important new insight into New York–based photography businesses in the mid-nineteenth century and contemplates the potential and hazards of using "found images" to study the urban context. The fifth chapter, "Playing the Early Renaissance City," by Ray Hutchison, investigates to what extent games can impart knowledge about a city's culture and how to navigate it, through analyzing the popular *Assassin's Creed* series set in early Renaissance Florence. The sixth and final chapter of Volume 18A, "Learning from Street View: Lessons in Urban Visuality," by Scott McQuire, offers a critical but balanced evaluation of Google Street View and Google Maps as key digital infrastructures in today's knowledge production of the urban context.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF PART B: EXPLORING THE URBAN EVERYDAY

The present, second, part devoted to *Visual and Multimodal Urban Sociology* hosts a further seven chapters, this time with an emphasis on methods and concrete applications of these methods in the form of rich visual and multimodal ethnographies on different aspects of everyday life in cities. Obviously, there are many intersections between chapters from both volumes, as most chapters combine a discussion and application of methods, disciplinary foci and technologies with a certain thematic interest.

Chapter 1, "Visually Exploring the Globalizing City: From Data Visualizations to 'In Situ' Approaches," discusses different options for researching globalization and cultural change in cities. It starts by examining key debates on globalization as a multifaceted and contested phenomenon and interrogating the predominantly quantitative approaches and visualizations of this phenomenon. Acting upon the limitations of these high-level and generic operationalizations and representations of globalization, I provide in this chapter a systematic overview of visual methods to interrogate the visual dimensions of globalization processes as expressed in material culture elements of a varied nature, as well as through visible and recordable aspects of human behavior in urban public spaces. This varied array of methods ranges from collecting and analyzing existing or "found" visual data from a variety of sources, to the purposeful production of

visual materials by the researcher in an exploratory, random, or systematic fashion, to using visual materials to elicit responses from respondents or to asking respondents to produce visual materials in response to a research assignment. Finally, researchers may choose to use their visual materials and skills to share their findings and insights in novel, more experimental, and experiential formats. Visual approaches to globalization and cultural exchanges – in particular those based on "in situ" observations and experiences – may help to enrich and complement the more abstract discourse of globalization and transnationalism with empirically grounded and localized insights regarding concrete expressions and enactments of cultural encounters in urban settings. Obviously these methods can be used for researching most other aspects of urban life, as exemplified by several chapters in this volume.

Chapter 2, "Perception in Motion: Alternative Research Techniques for Exploring the Urban Landscape," by Saskia I. de Wit, adds very important dimensions and insights to the study of the built environment as a site of analysis, capable of not just triggering visual but also a host of other sensory sensations. The author proposes several notation or scoring techniques to represent both the visual and the nonvisual qualities of moving through the many ephemeral aspects of the urban environment, thus providing the means to communicate the complex experiential potential of a constructed environment. To generate these scores, human subjects need to walk through designated urban spaces and record their multisensory dynamic impressions: what they see, hear, smell, and feel as they move along. Walking indeed constitutes a central way of experiencing a city and, as such, an embodied way of knowing. However, human subjects moving through space is for de Wit, in fact, just a device to "score" the field and to construct a more or less objective map of what the "place holds" in terms of sensory cues. Whereas many scholars will concentrate on how the environment is "processed" by individuals, this landscape architect chooses to concentrate on "unearthing" the formal traits of the perceived urban landscape and how these elements can be shaped to trigger certain actions and perceptions. De Wit also reminds us of the care needed when producing (visual) representations, as to an important extent they will determine the validity of the ensuing analysis.

In Chapter 3, "The Visual Commons: Where Residents Become Neighbors," Jon Wagner introduces the concept of a "visual commons," which emerged from his earlier involvement with community studies and theories, as well as from his visual ethnography spanning more than four decades of his neighborhood, "Thousand Oaks" in Berkeley, California. For over 45 years, Wagner photographed, as a participant-observer, numerous aspects of his changing neighborhood including streets and sidewalks, spaces in between, garbage bins, automobiles, houses, and vegetation, as well as resident wildlife – in short, anything that might help him understand "how people see where they live." He describes in great detail his encounter with the changing neighborhood as well as his intellectual journey toward conceptualizing this new idea. Wagner's concept of the "visual commons" seeks to confront existing visible features of a neighborhood with what residents make of it and care about. This could not be accomplished by just looking at the researcher-produced images but also involved

talking with the residents to bring about their imaginaries of the neighborhood and the issues that bring them together or set them apart. Through combining etic and emic approaches, Wagner was able to conceptualize the visual commons as a "workspace" that exists "in both resident imaginations and social interaction." This image-rich chapter offers a detailed longitudinal study of a particular neighborhood, while at the same time developing and applying an important new concept for community studies and urban sociology.

Chapter 4, "Burned out: A Visual and Lyrical Sociology of Smoking in the City," by Stephen Coleman and Jim Brogden, presents a microbehavioral ethnographic study of a noteworthy but largely taken-for-granted practice and social phenomenon, using two complementary methods: in-depth interviewing and researcher-produced photographs. The researchers embarked on this study by walking in the city center of Leeds to investigate the social practice of taking a break to smoke. They started conversations with smokers and vapers outside of corporate buildings and these interviews quickly moved beyond talking about the physical need for nicotine. More than the very act of smoking, these moments of going outside meant a needed break from the hectic rhythm of work life. During the many excursions in the city, photographs were made which provided evidence of individual smokers as "unique urban protagonists" and they also documented the place where these individuals chose to position themselves, possibly offering indications as to 'why', for example to seek a safe secluded spot, or a vantage point from which to observe, or to make contact with others. Coleman and Brogden discovered that besides the obvious act of smoking, these breaks were ascribed by the workers as moments for reflection, meditation, and for reconnecting to the city and the world. The main rationale of this "street-level" study was to explore: "how one such seemingly empty act of passing time reflects urban aspirations that are broader and deeper than are visible at first sight," but then also to raise "questions about how else urban cultures could make room for these vital human activities." This team of scholars, one a political scientist and the other a photography scholar, produced with this chapter another stellar example of a lyrical multimodal ethnography, integrating brilliantly phrased observations and reflections with equally important expressive photography.

In Chapter 5, "What We See, and What We Do Not: Resignifying Urban Traces of Colonialism," Giovanni Semi and Annalisa Frisina joined forces to address the crucial issue of visibility versus invisibility, or the presence and effects of "visibility regimes." Visibility regimes refer to the power held by dominant groups about what can be seen and how it should be seen, and as a corollary, what is purposefully left out of view, hidden, or aestheticized. Emancipatory actions therefore involve to an important extent a struggle for "visibility" and a breaking of silence, a legitimate striving to leave a state of invisibility or of being muted, to finally become seen and heard. The first part of the chapter discusses consecutive forms of urbanism, each characterized by a distinct visibility regime: the Fordist era with an emphasis on industrial manufacturing, the post-Fordist period with an emphasis on creating "cosmopolitan and sanitized public spaces, safe and purified from any form of conflict," and the emerging "platform urbanism" through to the accelerated process of mediated experiences and

networks, which create other forms of inequality and (in)visibility. The second part then applies the theoretical framing of the urban context as a site where visibility and invisibility are enacted, to the issue of decolonization and racism as arguably one of its more apparent instantiations. It describes a research project that Frisina conducted with her students to bring forward the "counter memories" of six Italian Afro-descendants by asking them to share their stories and reactions to traces of colonialisms (monuments, streets, shop names, etc.) in the streets of Padua. The project involved the production of a participatory video (titled: "Decolonizing the city. Visual dialogues in Padova"), the production of "counter images" by the interlocutors for display in the city, and walking methods. This chapter reminds us that visual research also involves being attentive to what is missing in the visible world, through performing a form of "negative" or reversed analysis of what is not in plain sight and why.

Chapter 6, "For an 'Expanded' Visual/Sensory Ethnography: Co-Living With Death in New Delhi," by Paolo Silvio Harald Favero, is aside from an intimate ethnographic account of a city, a rich and multilayered reflection on visual and multimodal research, or the ways in which established and emerging technologies are redefining and expanding the act of being among people, developing rapport, and capturing and sharing their unique views on life. Focusing on death as an intricate part of life in New Delhi, and in particular in connection with its unmatched degree of air pollution, the author vividly describes his encounters with fascinating people who are at the brink of death or at least preparing themselves for it. Balancing between ethnography and autoethnography, Paolo Favero shares his personal experiences with death and grieving as a way to connect with the research participants and prefers to see his interlocutors as "guides" in his quest for understanding important aspects of life and death. Exploring the agency of emerging visual and multisensory technologies and their largely unchartered research potential, Favero clearly emphasizes the need to abandon the too easily made distinctions between mediated and nonmediated events or online and offline presences, and instead to put more effort into qualifying the nature and intersections of different forms of mediation and how they amalgamate within a continuous space of living. In his diverse attempts to connect with aspects of death and grieving, he uses a combination of technologies to explore different sensory experiences, which he presents as a form of "expanded" ethnography. He uses a variety of filming techniques, allowing for serendipity rather than preplanned scenarios. But he also makes ample use of photography – and in particular portrait photography – as a participatory process to intimately connect with his interlocutors.

Chapter 7 concludes this second volume of *Visual and Multimodal Urban Sociology* in a very visual manner with an approach or format that has been discussed in Chapter 1 as the "visual essay." David Schalliol's contribution "Isolated Buildings as Indicators of Social Change: A Visual Essay" indeed invites the reader, after being provided with some factual information on the depicted sites and their changes, to take an active stance and explore the many instances of solitary houses as markers of urban renewal or decay in Chicago's landscape of economic and racial segregation. The separate photographs may

point to particular instances of neighborhood change and prompt the viewer to look for answers in the depicted environment about whether this is a first new building in a gentrifying neighborhood or the last stand in a decaying, divested environment. However, the full set of images (over 700 photographs which have been exhibited on various occasions) truly reveals the magnitude of this phenomenon. A series of separate depictions of isolated dwellings in deserted surroundings is followed by "thumbnail" panels or grid spreads, to entice readers to further explore the connections between these somewhat eerie remnants and the powers that shaped them. Both the informational and esthetic qualities of the photographs merit careful study and will prompt the viewer to ask questions, not only about individual cases, but through the accumulation of similar instances, about the more generic social, political, and economic mechanisms behind them. While visual scholars are not usually expected to be proficient in all aspects of the medium they are studying or employing, including the ability to produce images that excel in combining their mimetic and expressive potentials, this contribution exemplifies what may happen when a sociology professor proves to be in equal measure an accomplished photographer.

3. POSTSCRIPT

The contributions of both volumes of *Visual and Multimodal Urban Sociology*, varied and enlightening as they are in their own right, will gain more prominence by interconnecting to the overall quest of how to expand our knowledge of the urban through the use of multiple senses, established and emerging technologies, and ways to integrate the spatial and temporal dimension, and by grounding these efforts in solid – possibly hybrid and eclectic – theoretical frameworks and practicable methodologies. The contours and concrete realizations of "more visual, multimodal and cross-disciplinary" urban studies, as discussed here, are not presented as clearly delineated and comprehensive proposals but as indications of new frontiers to be explored.

Chapter 1

VISUALLY EXPLORING GLOBALIZING CITIES: FROM DATA VISUALIZATIONS TO 'IN SITU' APPROACHES

Luc Pauwels

ABSTRACT

Globalization, the ever-increasing worldwide flow of ideas, practices, and material objects resulting in increasing interdependency between people and nations across the globe, has numerous interrelated economic, political, cultural, ideological, environmental, and technological facets.

In an effort to make the elusive and multifaceted concept of globalization more tangible and measurable, different instruments have been developed, usually in the form of "indexes" based on quantitative data. These indexes mainly result in rankings of individual cities as well as whole countries with respect to their supposed level of globalization. Some items of the existing indexes to measure the level of globalization of nation states or cities refer to phenomena that are to some extent visually observable, but many aspects and manifestations of globalization escape these rather crude operationalizations.

Visual approaches to globalization help to enrich and complement the more abstract and mainly quantitatively supported discourses around this multifaceted phenomenon. They may provide valid and unobtrusive ways to assess and understand the impact of culture and cultural exchange in the daily lives of inhabitants of cities around the world and add a unique "localized," cross-cultural empirical perspective to the many divergent views and discussions about the presumed beneficial or detrimental nature of these processes. An 'in situ' visual approach to globalization may help to uncover the "real life" impact and the specific contexts of these processes at different locations. This

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chapter discusses different options for researching globalization and cultural change in cities.

Keywords: Data visualization; globalization index; participatory visual methods; repeat photography; visual analysis; visual essay; visual methods

1. INTRODUCTION: A VISUAL APPROACH TO GLOBAL EVERYDAY LIFE

This chapter interrogates the visual dimensions of globalization processes as expressed in material culture elements of a varied nature, as well as through visible and recordable aspects of human behavior in urban public spaces. It seeks to enrich and complement the more abstract discourse of globalization and transnationalism with empirically grounded insights regarding concrete expressions and enactments of cultural encounters in urban contexts.

While communication scholars have taken an interest in the (visual) study of globalization processes, they have so far focused predominantly on mass-mediated expressions (films, advertisements, and TV programs) and more recently on social media and new media technologies (YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, and Facebook). However, the actual sites where globalization takes place have received far less attention as concrete expressions of globalization. A study of globalization as experienced every day should definitely comprise aspects that are not premediated by mass media (behavior in public spaces and "grassroots expressions" such as graffiti and other signs of resistance or appropriation). Such a view "on the ground and in the open" may finally complement the dominant narrower mass media–focused and quantitative discourses on globalization.

This chapter will therefore focus on how to research the visible expression of this meeting of values, norms, and expectations in the public realm of the rich "hubs of culture" that metropolitan areas typically are and thus try to fill a void in the study of globalization and cultural exchange as it is enacted and experienced every day.

As media scholar Aiello (2011) astutely notes: "the urban built environment is not only a central dimension of the mediatization and overall semioticization of everyday life, but also a form and force of mediation in its own right." It is no less than a "fundamental context for the negotiation of local and global(izing) identities" (Gendelman & Aiello, 2010).

Visual methods and techniques may take on a more central – though not exclusive – role in the effort to shed light on some unexplored and underexposed avenues of globalization and cultural exchange by focusing on the key roles played by city dwellers, urban planners, designers, advertisers, commercial forces, cultural institutions, local authorities, tourists, artists, protesters etc., as social agents in the (re)production of these cultural processes on a day-to-day basis. Visual methods, with their focus on observable and unspoken aspects of society, have the capacity to uncover immaterial traits of society (norms, values, and expectations) by looking carefully at material artifacts as cultural expressions and at visual practices and performances of people.