

About the City of the Senses, the Senses in the City: An Introduction

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Zara Pinto-Coelho

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6651-3720>
zara@ics.uminho.pt

Helena Pires

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5533-4687>
hpires@ics.uminho.pt

Urban-oriented sensory analysis, inspired by ethnographic and phenomenological work developed in the last century, has a long tradition in the social sciences, namely in anthropology and sociology (e.g., Low & Kalekin-Fishman, 2018). However, in communication and cultural studies research, the sensorial orientation is still incipient. This publication is part of an ongoing call by *Passeio*, the platform for the study of art and urban culture of the Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS), for an organicist vision of the city, underlining the need to re-signify the role of the senses in the experience of everyday contemporary urban life by crossing disciplinary boundaries, approaches and geographies and using multi-sensory frameworks (Low, 2015). This initiative is included in Volume 8, Issue 1 of the *Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Sentient City – An Atonal Landscape* (Pires et al., 2020), and this ebook.

The title we chose for this ebook plays with the double meaning of “sense” in conceptualising and analysing the (post)city. Linked to perception, we

have the meanings that subjects give to the city in their urban experience and experimentation through sensations, emotions, or thoughts provided by sound, smell, touch, taste, and sight. The common denominator of this construction of senses, always socially and culturally contextualised, its base or medium is the skin, that is, the body. Drawing from “our most primitive physical dimension” (*phýsis/nature*) and making the body our “first place”, we can ask, making Cacciari’s (2004/2010) disquiet our own, “if we are a place, how can we not seek places?” (p. 45). Our ontological question, though today displaced to broad debates de-situating us outside the boundaries of the human – towards the composite, simultaneously organic and cybernetic, designated by Donna Haraway (2003) by the term “cyborg”, alongside other well-known terminologies by other authors, such as the “second self” by Sherry Turkle (2005), or the “posthuman” by Katherine Hayles (1999), or even the “post-phenomenological” body, according to Don Ihde (2002), – still does not dismiss the experience of the senses (*aesthesis*).

We are body-place insofar as we are formed on the grounds of our worldliness and connection with the sensitive universe (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, 1964) and by sharing that same phenomenological condition with others. We refer to cohabited places and, in particular, those woven by the constructed structure, the urban artefacts, the incessant flow of different luminosities, temperatures, rhythms and sounds, and the concentration of crowds and interaction between subjects, places of passage and ritualisation of everyday life. We talk about the city of the senses, the multiple forms of perception of inhabited places, out-of-doors. As opposed to the anthropological vision of Marc Augé (1992/2016), who argues that the so-called “non-places” disconnect us from the sense of relationality, identity and history, we recognise in the fragmentary experiences we live unfolded modes of being: in the train or underground stations, in public gardens, in the streets, or even in the enclosures of automobile transport, which still allow us to establish a cinematic relationship (Friedberg, 1993) with the space travelled and the scenes of ordinary life, as a travelling, mediated by the senses.

The city happens in these encounters between the being and the world, mediated by the multiple visual, sound, olfactory, tactile and gustatory signs. In other words, individuals in their perceptions give meaning to the urban experience, establishing bridges that connect their lives to the urban dynamics and others. That is the second sense of meaning implied in the title chosen for this work. Thus, there are multiple meanings of the city. In this publication, the city is perceived as a prosthetic place, inhabited by everyday life, the city as a body-city with which we body ourselves. To such

an organic conception, we add its inextricable technological imbrication, on the one hand, and the imaginary that produces the experience of feeling, on the other. The permanent reinvention of the sense of the city (and its senses) reflects its changing socio-geographic reality. It extends beyond the historical centres. It follows the (dis)figurations of the territory, urbanisation as a global phenomenon that colours with hybrid shades, each piece of ground strewn with shared experience and imaginary.

David Hopper, in painting, or, in the Portuguese context, André Cepeda, in photography, give expression to various senses of the urban in which public life and being-together or the sense of belonging to a place are disconcerted. Deeply solitary characters, though surrounded by the coexistence of those who cohabit in brief fragments of space-time, in cafés, or at roadside petrol stations, seem to surrender, in the painter's paintings, to a feeling of visible melancholy, directing the senses towards an intimate communication with the surrounding world. The books between hands (today Hopper could perhaps be inspired by the observation of individuals connected to mobile phones in the most varied public places), the lost gaze on the landscape, experiences of sensitive and invisible (in)communication while places are emptied of sociality. Cepeda highlights cutting lines, such as the motorway separators, severing the territory, transforming it into a challenge to the connection of the body able of walking, of crossing, constraining the modes of appropriation of the place and dwelling, and introducing conflicts or challenges that forcing the reinvention of other practices, creative, of use and experience. That reminds us of the importance of thinking about the countless meanings of the urban (Domingues, 2009). Can these examples illustrate the "end of the city" as a place of encounters, shared experiences and senses, and social life produced through socio-economic and symbolic exchanges?

The city is a plural and complex reality. There are many senses attached to the notion of the city today: the city as an expression of modernity (Simmel and Benjamin are among the founders of a reflection of the metropolitan urban condition), the skin of materialist culture (cities are understood, in this perspective, as "forests of signs"); the (post)historical city – extended to urban centres and the so-called "suburbs"; the spectacle city (unrealised and transformed into a pure simulacrum, a Disneylandised city); the nature-city, the organic, unattached city (whose dynamics are made and unmade, as opposed to the planned and disciplined city); the inhabited and lived city (perceived in its social and cultural tensions and frictions); the global city, the cyber city...

While the concept of city today has no correspondence with the experience of a confined socio-territorial place, on the other hand, its vast imaginary

follows us through all (non)places, including the “dwelling exotopic” (Felice, 2009/2012). Among the many urban senses, whether seen from the standpoint of geography, philosophy, sociology or history, we highlight the sense of senses in the production of endless possibilities of accessing the perception of our connection to the common world there is to see, to walk through, to hear, to know, to discover... Our sensory and affective disconnection from such desire for connection may be evidence of the redefinition of the body itself as a deterritorialised place. As Cacciari (2004/2010) would say, “the city is everywhere”, and the senses of the city, we add, are all that allow us, still, to grasp the aesthetic-sensible as a discontinuous mode of being-with-the-others in contemporaneity.

The Book's Structure

This book includes theoretical and/or empirical contributions from researchers in sociology, communication and cultural studies, who explore three fundamental questions: (a) the effects of the tourist era under the COVID-19 pandemic, (b) the role of music in the production of places and socialities; and (c) the importance of ambiances in the constitution of a carnal relationship with the city.

Another particular aspect of this publication is that it includes publications written by researchers with work done in the field urban studies alongside those of PhD students pursuing new research paths in communication and cultural studies.

The volume opens with an article by Fabio La Rocca, a researcher at Centre d'Études sur l'Actuel et le Quotidien, Paris-Descartes, Sorbonne. It is not the first time this researcher has shared with the CECS community his post-modern proposal for reading the city. In 2010, he outlined his proposal in an article published in Volume 18 of the journal *Comunicação e Sociedade*. The author argued that understanding the urban today requires being in tune with the “diffuse metropolis’ sense of the present” (La Rocca, 2010, p. 160). According to the author, one must also look at the potential conditions offered by the power of the “urban experience re-enchantment”, highlighting the multiple signs providing “each city with a specific air and a sensitive poetics that reflect its essence, state of mind, vitality, and being” (La Rocca, 2010, p. 161). In the chapter we are now publishing, “Mood and Ambiances: A Narration of Expressive Forms and Urban Emotions”, Fabio La Rocca highlights the quality of urban ambiances as a way of approaching the urban phenomenon. He claims that *flânerie* proves to be the appropriate method for

this purpose. It enables one to perceive the spatial essences and the societal energies which shape a carnal relationship with the urban space and allow the narration of the city from the standpoint of its moods. It is about understanding the city that expresses itself through the senses as a continuous process of experiences and the senses that we can build through experience, highlighting the expressive situations and making the city speak, thus opening the doors to the multiplicity of expressions of what is lived.

Pedro Andrade, a sociologist and a researcher at CECS, in “Everyday Urban Life: Genealogy and Journal of Actors’ Bodies in the Viral City”, gives an account of some theoretical reflections included in a sociology project about the urban fabric confined and transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fieldwork developed is documented through photographs taken in 2020, revealing manifestations and effects of the pandemic in the daily life of cities, in the economic and cultural spheres and citizenship. The article proposes general assumptions to test the progressive definition of what can be understood as a viral society, which includes, among other processes, the viral city and the viral bodies of social actors and ways to overcome it through strategies of *social remobilisation*.

The chapter “The City of Guinga is Biographical” by Teresa Lima, a PhD student in communication sciences at the University of Minho and Zara Pinto-Coelho, a professor at the University of Minho and a researcher at CECS, explores the relationship between life-body, city-place and music, as part of an organic and symbolic whole. They seek to understand what art does to an artist and those who experience it, based on the composition “Meu Pai”, (my father) by the Brazilian musician Guinga. The authors show that the artist creates bridges between the self and the worlds with whom he dialogues, trying to identify with a place, in this case, the city, which thus acquires the status of an organic whole, that is, of a body, another with whom one interacts.

Drawing from a preliminary mapping of street percussion groups performing in the cities of Fortaleza (Brazil) and Braga (Portugal), the chapter “Urban Drummers: The Experience of Playing, Being and Feeling in Community”, Fábio Marques, a PhD student in cultural studies at the University of Minho, in collaboration with Jean-Martin Rabot and Helena Pires, professors at the same university and researchers at the CECS, discuss concepts and possible approaches to the understanding of the meanings given to this type of practice. Underlining the meanings given to them by those who participate in this type of practice daily, the authors discuss some definitions related to

the practice and group organisation of this type of cultural manifestation to understand its meanings in contemporary societies.

The book ends with the chapter “The Tourist Era in the City of Porto: Enchantment, Suspension and (Un)Sustainability” by Márcia Silva, a PhD student in sociology at the University of Minho, with Emília Araújo and Rita Ribeiro, professors at the same university and members of the CECS. It explores the time of tourism in Porto and its effects on things, spaces and the experiential time of the city and its residents, taking 2017 as a benchmark, the year they started a photographic repository of the city. It discusses some of the implications and challenges of the touristification process, around three main halts in the city’s time: the “time of the city’s enchantment” by tourism; “the time of decline”, with the drastic reduction in tourist numbers following the COVID-19 pandemic; and the “wait” that is “desperate” for tourism to return.

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