Place, Space, Identity: A Spatial Semiotics of the Urban Vernacular in Global Cities

Although urban communities in global cities appear quite different, particularly at first glance, spatial semiotic analysis reveals similarities in 'glocalized' spaces. People change the meaning of social spaces by changing the way these places look, through their activities and by their presence. Understanding how this meaning-making happens is critical to the study of urban places and cultures. Because of globalization, diverse people frequently live within the same political boundaries, but the real test of community takes place during the course of everyday life on the streets, in the shops, and in public spaces of neighborhoods. Class, racial, and ethnic hierarchies mark urban space with differential meanings. Though disadvantaged in conflicts with elites, ordinary urban dwellers express their agency in the ways they challenge and sometimes subvert the 'official' uses of social space. This entails, in part, remaking the space to look familiar in order to make the space their own place. Through their social interactions and their material traces, urban dwellers fill social space with expressive, conative and phatic signs of their collective identity. The spatial semiotic perspective, we argue, offers a way to transcend the usual global/local dichotomy of globalization research. Immigrant urban cultures produce spaces of mixture, where both similarity and difference co-exist. We present data from urban neighborhood communities in US and European cities. Our spatial semiotic analysis reveals how micro-segregation and group interactions produce urban culture, constrained by and challenging existing power arrangements, at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Timothy Shortell and Jerome Krase, Department of Sociology, Brooklyn College CUNY, USA.

Place, Space, Identity: A Spatial Semiotics of the Urban Vernacular in Global Cities

Much of the recent work on global cities examines global capitalism and the function of cities within it. Often neglected in this literature is the role of global flows of people and cultures. The cities identified as global as a result of their position in world economy are often also centers of global im/migration. Just as the institutions of global capitalism have changed urban places and spaces, so too has the movement of people from one culture to another. In the vernacular spaces of urban neighborhoods, the effects of im/migration are easily seen.

Visual analysis of social space in urban vernacular neighborhoods reveals much about the phenomenological nature of globalization. An examination of the quotidian rhythms of urban life is as important to our understanding of the nature of globalization as the analysis of large scale social forces and institutions. The everyday lives of urban dwellers are shaped by forces outside of their control, certainly, but people assert agency in a multitude of ways. We can see this in their practices when they perform identity, making the social spaces they occupy like 'home.'

The everyday practices of ordinary people who have been brought together by globalization are examples of what Robertson (1997) meant when he coined the term 'glocalization.' According to Osterhammel and Petersson (2005:7), 'Robertson recognized that homogenizing and universalizing forces of globalization do not obliterate the heterogeneity and particularity of local forces as much as their interaction creates varying degrees of hybrid culture.' People perform their collective identity by making use of the materials of this hybrid. Their practices and symbols might not be identical to those of their culture of origin, but they are no less meaningful as a result.

In this essay, we argue that sociological analysis of visual data is necessary to understand how urban vernacular neighborhoods are changing as a result of globalization. Visual data reveals the constructed and dynamic nature of social meanings and the ways in which urban space is both the context of and product of ethnic and class transformations. We will briefly document some of these transformations with photographs of ethnic vernacular neighborhoods in Antwerp, Berlin, Brooklyn, Cape Town, Darmstadt, Gothenburg, Lisbon, Los Angeles, Manchester, New Britain, New York, Oslo, Paris, Philadelphia, and St. Petersburg. These urban spaces are filled with signs of collective identity and, often, inter-group competition. In the physical environment, architectural details, commercial signs, graffiti, among other things, signify the flows of people and culture. So too do social practices, such as commercial transactions, socializing, and commuting, in the public spaces of vernacular ethnic neighborhoods. Our analysis, based on the images shown here and hundreds of others, reveals what glocalization looks like and demonstrates the connection between social space and collective identity.

Spatial Semiotics

Simmel (1908/1924) established the central role of the visible in theorizing about the complex and constantly changing metropolis. He noted the extent to which modern cities made social differences part of the visual landscape, the way that cities looked. Urban dwellers, he argued, changed the ways that they related to the built environment and to each other as a result. Combining Simmel and other seminal urban theorists, such as Lefebvre (1991), Lofland (1985, 2003), and Jackson (1984), Krase and colleagues

(Krase, 2002, 2003; Krase and Hum, 2007; Krase and Shortell, 2008; Shortell and Krase, 2009) have demonstrated that ordinary people change the meaning of spaces and places by changing their appearance, through their activities and by their presence.

Harvey (1989, 2006) argued that the powerful reproduce and enhance their power by controlling public space. Through appropriation and domination, the powerful differentiate public space. The lives of ordinary urban dwellers take place in this context. Though disadvantaged in their struggles with the powerful, ordinary urban dwellers are not powerless. They contest and sometimes subvert domination by using public space for their own ends, sometimes through collective action and sometimes by 'unofficially' being in the space.

There is a simple formula for the process by which agency transforms representation into practice in vernacular landscapes: ethnic groups simply going about their daily business present themselves to the observer. The observer then re-presents their performances in descriptions that in turn become representations – in some cases, stereotypes, and in others, commodified icons of 'otherness.' Beauregard and Haila (2000) note that despite the increased spatial complexity of late 20th century urbanism, a distinctly 'postmodern' city has not displaced the modern one and is just as 'legible' as its precursor. Lofland (1985) might add that cities have always been changing in response to the entrance of 'strangers.' The difference today is primarily that urban change follows a different logic of location.

Fritzsche (1996), Lynch (1960), and King (1996) speak of cities as 'text' to be read and, we argue here, ordinary streetscapes are important yet often ignored parts of that text. Zukin (1996:44) adds that 'Visual artifacts of material culture and political

economy thus reinforce – or comment on – social structure. By making social rules "legible" they represent the city.'

Vernacular landscapes are the interpretive context of the signs of collective identity of interest in the present research. Signs have meanings that relate to the patterns and places of urban life. These give sensibility to the 'visual impressions' that Simmel (1908/1924) so thoughtfully observed. The vernacular landscape is both the built and social environments, what Gottdiener (1994) called 'settlement space.' Lived experience in urban communities, as well as media sources about urban culture, is used to make sense of the signs of collective identity.

The semiotic medium for collective identity is multi-modal, including both language and visual signs. There are codes for appearance, for example, and nominal codes. There are visual codes that relate colors to identity and codes for alphabets as physical signs of geography. Distinctive cultural practices are also a code; perhaps the most common of these relate to food and dress.

The markers of collective identity are in a constant state of tension among alternative interpretations of self and other. Jakobson (1960, 1972) identified three functions of signs that can help us interpret the visual representations of identity in urban neighborhoods: the *expressive*, the *conative*, and the *phatic*. Jakobson was thinking of the structure of language in his work, but the functionality he describes may be applied to visual markers also. In doing so, we are extending Jakobson's semiotics in a manner that may be useful for urban sociologists.

Expressive signs give the subject a voice; they are an important component of social agency. According to Jakobson, these signs are oriented toward the addresser; they

reveal his or her emotive state. In the context of urban neighborhoods, people create expressive signs in the course of their everyday practices when they enact rituals of identity. Among the most visible of these practices is the use of flags, national colors, or place names to proclaim origins.

In Jakobson's view, conative signs attempt to influence others' behavior. In language, the use of vocative case or imperative mood signals the conative function. Conative signs highlight the relationship between the addresser and addressee, and place an obligation on the latter. Markers of exclusion are one important type of conative sign in the urban vernacular landscape. Graffiti can be said, in some instances, to be of this type. So too can the uses of native alphabets. To the extent that social space is contested, conative signs are common; they call attention to group boundaries, marking the space between the in-group and out-groups.

Jakobson describes phatic signs as those that are oriented toward contact (Hawkes, 2003). In language, this includes, among other things, phrases which facilitate continued communication rather than are strictly denotative. For example, 'How are you?' is often used not as an inquiry into the health of the other as much as an invitation to have a conversation. Other examples include questions like 'You know what I mean?' which function as tests of the connection between addresser and addressee. Applied to visual codes, phatic signs are those that serve as an inducement to social interaction. They work not through denotation primarily, but by confirming the connection between individuals, and between people and places.

In the end, visual signs that facilitate social relations, like these linguistic customs, might be the most common signifier of the urban vernacular. Phatic signs are

artifacts of ordinary social interaction. They are the indicators that we are at home in our neighborhood. Phatic signs express that this social space belongs to us, that our cultural practices are acceptable here. Through phatic signs, cultural strangers can assert their agency in the social spaces of the host country.

Method and Data

Visual sociologists generally use one or more of three different kinds of images in research. Some researchers have research subjects produce images. Other researchers use found or pre-existing images as data. In the present research, we employ the third kind, researcher-produced images (Warren and Karner, 2005; Pauwels, 2008). We use a visual method called the photographic survey (Krase and Shortell, 2007, 2008, 2009; Shortell and Krase, 2009) to collect data. The photographic survey is a technique for taking images of urban neighborhoods in order to record visual information at a particular place and time. Photographs are taken as the researcher travels through a neighborhood systematically photographing public spaces, without regard to particular content or aesthetics.

The photographic survey records both the physical and social streetscapes. It is important for data collection not to be determined by the researcher's attention – that is, the researcher must not photograph only that which seems, at that moment, to be of interest. The photographic survey is designed to collect images in which the social content might not be immediately noticed. This overcomes the most important shortcoming of most studies using researcher-produced data: sampling bias. Like the ethnographer collecting observational data, this method produces a lot of visual

information in the field, the significance of which may be known only later, upon reflection.

Photographs taken in this manner emphasize more distant content rather than foreground; this is because the inhabitants of neighborhood spaces may regard being photographed as invasive (Prosser and Schwartz, 1998) and also because the recognition of the act of data recording can change the nature of human behavior.

Multiple trips are required to adequately cover a particular neighborhood. Because social life in urban neighborhoods is dynamic, varying by time of day, day of week, and week of year, as well as year to year, more trips to photograph a neighborhood results in data with greater validity. It becomes possible to see patterns when the collection of images extends beyond the boundaries of particular urban cycles. The end result of data collection using the photographic survey is hundreds of photographs.

Following Harper (1988), we adhere to a visual method in which the photographs are data, records of the structuring of social life, not ornaments to illustrate sociological concepts. To study spatial semiotics of urban vernacular landscapes, researchers must use visual data of the built and social spaces of urban neighborhoods. Just as with non-visual sociologists, researchers have to be attentive to the ways in which data collection shapes the possibilities of analysis.

All image data for this project are available at www.BrooklynSoc.org; the photo archive contains more than 7,000 images from more than 30 global cities. Images for the present analysis include neighborhoods in Antwerp, Berlin, Brooklyn, Cape Town, Darmstadt, Gothenburg, Lisbon, Los Angeles, Manchester, New Britain, New York, Oslo, Paris, Philadelphia, and St. Petersburg.

Scenes from Urban Vernacular Spaces in Global Cities

Figure 1 shows two views of streetscapes along Coney Island Avenue in Brooklyn. Image (a) shows parents and children near a public school. The style of dress – in particular, the head scarves – signal identity information about the people using this public space. In image (b), we see the same kind of phatic sign, though in this case the identity of the people in the image is different. In the first photograph, the people in the foreground are Muslim; in the second image, the crowd on the corner is Orthodox Jewish. Observers of the neighborhoods along Coney Island Avenue, whether they themselves are Muslim, Jewish, or something else, would be able to recognize the semiotic function of the style of dress (without being aware of it as a semiotic function), and in a sense, know to whom the neighborhood 'belongs.'

(a) (b)

Figure 1. Phatic signs of collective identity in Brooklyn. (a) Muslim parents and children near a public school. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2003. (b) Orthodox Jewish women on a commercial street. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

The built environment also contains phatic signs of identity. In Figure 2, the presence of certain kinds of businesses marks the territory as an 'immigrant neighborhood.' In image (a), money transfer and telecommunications services are to be

found on a commercial street in Belleville, Paris. This part of the neighborhood is pan-Asian, and the services reflect this. The CD and DVD store, at the far left of the photograph, sells entertainment and other specialty items from East Asia. In image (b), money transfer and travel services are offered. These businesses in the Pakistani neighborhood along Coney Island Avenue, in Brooklyn, also use alphabets on signage as an indicator of who lives here.

 (a) (b)

Figure 2. Phatic signs of identity in the built environment. (a) Common immigrant services in Belleville. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2007. (b) Common immigrant services in Brooklyn. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

Immigrant services, such as shops selling phone cards for cheap calls to particular areas, are reliable markers of glocalization. In Figure 3, additional examples of this kind of phatic sign are shown. In image (a), a shop window in Chinatown, Philadelphia, advertises calling cards with an emphasis on East Asia. Not only the language of the signage, but also the particular array of cards and rates signals the potential customers of this business. We can read who the local market is by observing such emphasis. In a similar fashion, we can observe the local market in the advertising of entertainment. Image (b) shows a message board in a public plaza in Angered Centrum, an ethnic suburb of Gothenburg, on which a variety of announcements have been placed. Unlike

advertisements in other media, which might reflect the homogenizing effects of globalization, message boards like this don't have much reach; they are for local consumption only.

 (a) (b)

Figure 3. More phatic signs in the urban vernacular landscape. (a) Window advertising telecommunications services in Chinatown, Philadelphia. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2003. (b) Message board in a public plaza in Angered Centrum, an ethnic suburb of Gothenburg. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

Cultural products like food and clothing also mark urban neighborhoods as belonging to certain groups. Figure 4 shows two examples of store windows that are visually very similar. In image (a), the window of the 'Asian Cloth House' in Olso advertises particular fashions. In image (b), the same can be seen in a window of a shop on Rue du Faubourg Saint Denis in the 10th arrondissement of Paris. The style of dress reflects a distinct cultural marker; although anyone is free to shop in these places, the presence of the window displays – as well as people wearing these fashions on the street – marks the territory as a 'South Asian neighborhood.'

(a)

(b)

Figure 4. Clothing as a phatic signs of ethnic identity. (a) 'Asian Cloth House' on Tøyengata in Oslo. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2010. (b) South Asian fashions for sale on Rue du Faubourg Saint Denis in Paris. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

Figure 5 shows how food operates as a similar phatic sign. Food choices reflect cultural norms. The logic of commerce results in food shops stocking and advertising products that are in demand by the local community. Image (a) shows a Chinese market in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The large Chinese community in the neighborhood shops in places like this. Others tend to see the display of these foods as evidence that Sunset Park is a Chinese neighborhood. In image (b), an Indian and Pakistani grocery functions in the same way. This shop, and the neighboring bakery, and others on the block, effectively designate this part of Coney Island Avenue as 'Little Pakistan' in Brooklyn.

(a)
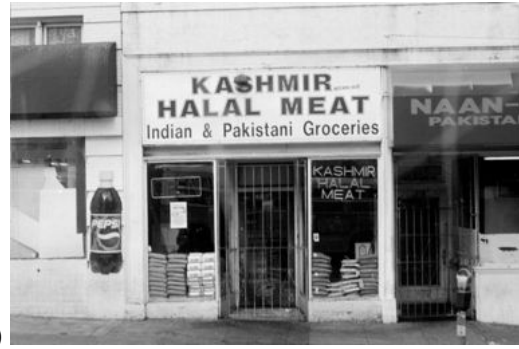
(b)

Figure 5. Food is a common phatic sign of ethnic identity. (a) Market in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, also known as Brooklyn's Chinatown. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2003. (b) Indian and Pakistani Groceries in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2000.

Ethnic cuisine is, of course, global and is not necessarily a reliable indicator of a neighborhood's population. The 'authenticity' of such cuisine is often a marketing tactic, not a historical argument. Nonetheless, some ethnic restaurants are manifestations of glocalization. Figure 6 displays two scenes which might be interpreted in this way. Image (a) shows the 'Little Aladdin' restaurant on High Street in Manchester, in the Northern Quarter. The neighborhood is known as the 'hipster' neighborhood, which might suggest that it offers Indian food for non-Indians. But Manchester has a sizable South Asian population nearby, and the window promises 'it's just like home cooking' – a message seemingly oriented toward those for whom Indian dishes would be their home cuisine. Image (b) shows the façade of 'Istanbul Grill' on Potsdamer straße at Bulöwstraße in Berlin. The façade advertises *döner*, the rotary grilling style of Turkish cuisine. Germany hosts a significant Turkish population, making these restaurants more common in contemporary German cities. Although *döner* is becoming a popular 'street food' in global cities with Muslim populations, such restaurants still signify immigrant spaces.

(a)   (b)

Figure 6. Restaurants also represent a phatic sign of ethnic identity. (a) "Little Aladdin' on High Street in Manchester. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009. (b) 'Istanbul Grill' on Potsdamer straße in Berlin. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2008.

Other features of public space can function as phatic signs, as shown in Figure 7. In image (a), a banner advertises the Manchester Art Gallery by showing a young Muslim woman looking at art. By targeting untypical English patrons, the banner normalizes the connection between the social space of Manchester and Muslim immigrants. In image (b), a salon on Boulevard Magenta in Paris is painted with a holiday theme. The black African woman wearing the Santa hat is a subtle sign that the neighborhood is multiracial. In fact, many of the shops on this stretch of the boulevard are patronized by Paris' large black population.

(a)   (b)

Figure 7. Phatic signs of multiculturalism typical of immigrant neighborhoods in global cities. (a) The Manchester Art Gallery banner showing a young Muslim women viewing their collection. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009. (b) Shop window of a salon on Boulevard de Magenta in the 10th arrondissement of Paris. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

Figures 1 to 7 show the ways that urban dwellers change the meaning of social spaces by using and occupying them. The phatic signs displayed give evidence of an important form of social agency. Immigrants (and migrants) may lack political power, or economic or social capital, but they have the power to make their social spaces reflect their identity. They ways in which they do this are many; some are easily recognizable cultural practices such as clothing and food. Others are the result of ordinary commerce associated with population mobility. This is what glocalization looks like.

Phatic signs also signify social class identity. In Figure 8, two images mark the contrast between high and low status in urban environments. Image (a) shows an informal flower market in St. Petersburg. The vendors of the flowers are identified as belonging to the bottom of the class hierarchy by the fact that they do this kind of labor, as well as their appearance. Many shoppers on the street tend to ignore these workers because of the stigma associated with their lack of status. In contrast, image (b) shows a block of brownstones in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. The neighborhood is a hot zone of gentrification, and the social space of blocks like this are assigned to the upper middle class.

Figure 8. (a) St. Petersburg informal flower market. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2008. (b) Block of brownstones in Prospect Heights, a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn neighborhood. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009.

Urban vernacular landscapes are filled with expressive as well as phatic signs of collective identity. Expressive signs are just as effective in marking urban social space as belonging to particular social groups. Figure 9 demonstrates how houses of worship function as expressive signs; these mosques signify not only the faith community, but also immigrant status. Image (a) shows the minaret of a mosque in Cape Town. The architecture is distinctive. In image (b), a storefront mosque uses the traditional colors of Islam, green and white, as well as the Arabic alphabet to announce itself. Both the signage and the function of the building are expressive signs. There are often worshippers outside, further marking the territory as home to the North African Muslims who live in the surrounding blocks.

(a)   (b)

Figure 9. Places of worship are expressive signs of religious identity. (a) Minaret of a mosque in Cape Town. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2000. (b) Storefront mosque in La Goutte d'Or, Paris. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

As with phatic signs, both the built environment and the social activity that takes place within it have semiotic functions. Figure 10 shows two examples of collective action serving as an expressive sign of collective identity. Image (a) shows a pro-democracy protest in Piccadilly Gardens by Manchester's local Iranian community. The participants and the protest signs and flags they carried were clearly expressing a connection to Iran, temporarily marking the park as their space. Image (b) shows a march for the rights of 'undocumented persons' in Paris. The march appeared to be headed toward Place de la République, a traditional space for populist collective action. The photograph shows the march turning onto Boulevard de la Chapelle from La Goutte d'Or, a neighborhood of North African and West African immigrants.

(a)

(b)

Figure 10. Collective action can be an expressive sign of identity. (a) 'Democracy in Iran' protest in Manchester's Piccadilly Gardens. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009. (b) *'Persones sans papiers'* march in Paris. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2010.

Explicit performances of culture also function as expressive signs. In Figure 11, two examples of such performances, both the spectacular and the quotidian, are displayed. Image (a) shows a scene from the annual Turkish Day parade in New York. Image (b) shows a pair of Andean musicians performing for tips (and selling CDs) in Stockholm. Buskers like this are common in global cities.

(a)

(b)

Figure 11. More examples of collective action as an expressive sign. (a) Scene from the Turkish Day parade in New York. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2003. (b) Andean musicians in Stockholm. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2008.

One of the more ubiquitous signs of immigrant status and ethnic identity in global neighborhoods is the national flag. Two examples are given in Figure 12. Image (a) reveals a mural featuring the Puerto Rican flag on a residential street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The gentrification of the neighborhood has put pressure on the Puerto Rican working class neighborhood; the presence of Puerto Rican stores other local businesses between Bedford Street and the waterfront, south of Grand Street, is diminishing. In image (b) a variation on the flag theme is displayed. The fascia of the 'Polish-American Congress' office in New Britain, Connecticut, uses the coat of arms and red and white of the Polish flag, shaped like the state of Connecticut, to announce its ethnic identity.

(a)   (b)

Figure 12. (a) Puerto Rican flag mural, Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2010. (b) 'Polish-American Congress' in New Britain, Connecticut. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2000.

The two images in Figure 13, from Los Angeles, illustrate how 'ethnic theme parks' use commodified expressive signs. Krase (1997:105) explains the ethnic theme park as a place where the experience of the ethnic 'other' is for sale, particularly to tourists. Monuments to the group's ethnic 'heritage' and 'anthropological gardens' where visitors can see glimpses of the 'good old days' are common signifiers.

Image (a) shows a busy shopping plaza in Los Angeles, Olvera Street, where one can buy mementos of Latino culture. The locals call it 'La placita Olvera' and there are places to buy 'authentic' Mexican-American food as well as the usual tourist fare. Image (b) is a scene from the iconic Chinatown in Los Angeles (not far from *El Pueblo*). The 'traditional' architecture of the 'Hop Louie' restaurant, and the dozens of similar buildings, attracts thousands of tourists yearning for a glimpse of the 'Chinese' way of life.

(a) (b)

Figure 13. 'Ethnic theme parks' are full of commodified expressive signs. (a) *El Pueblo de Los Angeles*, a place for ethnic cuisine and shopping. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2001. (b) Façade of the 'Hop Louie' restaurant in Los Angeles' Chinatown.

Gentrification generates a plethora of expressive signs of class identity, as gentrifiers mark the territory as having acquired new status. All things upscale are signs of upper middle class status, including the 'ironic' use of working class features, such as business names and façades. Figure 14 shows two examples of these expressive signs of class. Image (a) shows a busy shopping block in the heart of Lisbon's gentrified downtown, Avenida da Liberdade. Here local Lisbon history, the site of the original market near the port, mixes with globalized luxury brands. Image (b) shows the façade of a upscale restaurant in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn, which promises 'fine Japanese cuisine.' Careful attention to the creation of upscale ambience is common sign of the gentrified business. The contrast with working class Caribbean restaurants a couple blocks away is striking.

 (a)

Figure 14. Expressive signs of class identity. (a) Shopping on Avenida da Liberdade, one of the most gentrified areas of Lisbon. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009. (b) Upscale dining in an 'authentic' Japanese restaurant in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009.

Alphabets on signage and the façades of buildings on commercial streets are commonplace conative signs of identity. Figure 15 shows a couple of examples of this. In image (a), the menus for two restaurants in Manchester's Chinatown are displayed. The restaurant on the left has a bilingual menu. But at the restaurant on the right, the menu is in Chinese only (except for the name of the restaurant, in English). This would be an invitation to Chinese speakers, but a significant disincentive for those lacking literacy in the language. In image (b), the presence of Polish on the fascia and awning of a pharmacy acts as an invitation to the longstanding Polish community in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. The pharmacy is a franchise in a popular chain, but this one is customized for the local community.

(a)   (b)

Figure 15. Conative signs of ethnic identity. (a) Chinese restaurant menus in Manchester. Photograph by Timothy Shortell, 2009. (b) Polish on the awning and fascia of a Duane Reade pharmacy in Greenpoint, Brooklyn. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2010.

Aspects of the built environment can also function as a conative sign, as shown in Figure 16. The iconic marker of urban poverty in the global south, the shantytown, is

usually interpreted to be a sign of danger to outsiders. In image (a), this township outside

of Cape Town could almost stand for urban poverty throughout the developing world. As

noted by Gehl (2010), South Africa has tried, with its 'dignified places programme' to

create quality urban space for the poor to counter this prevalent symbol. In image (b), the

effect is seen from the opposite end of the class hierarchy; this is a streetscape along

Vasagaten in Gothenburg. Though not quite as well known as its more gentrified, and

touristy, neighbor, the adjacent Haga neighborhood, this area is lined trendy restaurants

and shops, basking in the status of *Göteborgs Universitet*. This is not a place for the faint

of wallet.

(a)

Figure 16. (a) Township outside of Cape Town. Photograph by Jerome Krase, 2000. (b)

Discussion

  These vernacular landscapes are everywhere and changing as a result of

globalization, urbanization, modernization, immigration, and other forces that in many

cases create layers, or palimpsests, of competing European, Asian, African, and Latin

American cultural artifacts. As people move from their home nation, they take signs of

their culture and implant these in their neighborhood in the host nation through their

social practices. This includes everything from physical changes in the built environment

to the their mere presence in the social spaces of the new neighborhood. Immigrants generally lack the power to recreate the valued spaces of their home cultures, but their day-to-day lives are full of expressive, conative, and phatic signs of their collective identity. The urban cultural landscape has traces of the most diverse array of ethnic influences anywhere in the world, as seen in the material and interactional forms associated with their home culture – everything from architectural styles and folk art to fashion and food preferences.

Glocalization is a hybrid, and substantially manifests itself in phatic signs in vernacular neighborhoods. The goods and services desired by locals, in immigrant neighborhoods, ascribe the place as ethnic, and often, working-class or poor, by virtue of the concentration of physical markers of identity or the spatial distribution of people. It is a tangible proof of the agency of non-elite urban dwellers that they can define the meaning of their social spaces, to some extent, by their presence. Our photographic data reveals, over and over again, evidence of this in vernacular neighborhoods in global cities.

The social practices of urban dwellers also function as phatic signs, as many of our images reveal. Through everyday behaviors, people perform their ethnic and class identity for others – those who share social spaces with them, as residents or visitors. Looking for work – and, indeed, working itself – commuting, socializing, shopping, and even playing football are ways that urban dwellers communicate their identity by being in social spaces in vernacular landscapes.

Expressive signs, particularly in contested spaces, are another important feature of the vernacular landscape. Both as individual acts and as collective behavior, expressive

signs of identity are ubiquitous in urban communities. Whether or not these are the same acts and behaviors that one would observe in the home countries does not matter in this regard. They remain performances of collective identity in glocalized spaces of global cities.

In global cities, as urban dwellers learn to live with 'cultural strangers,' they come to acquire a visual literacy with regard to glocalization. In both the physical and social environments, expressive and phatic signs of ethnic and class identity are commonplace in vernacular neighborhoods. As globalization generates ever more population mobility, urban dwellers may come to regard the look of glocal signs as normative. 'Cultural strangers' may become not so strange after all.

References

Beauregard, R. A. and Haila, A. (2000), 'The Unavoidable Continuities of the City', in P.

   Marcuse and R. Van Kempen (eds) Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order?, pp.

   22- 36. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fritzsche, P. (1996) Reading Berlin 1900. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gehl, J. (2010) Cities for People. Washington, DC: Island Press.

Gottdiener, M. (1994) The New Urban Sociology. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Harper, D. (1988) 'Visual Sociology: Expanding Sociological Vision.' American

   Sociologist 19 (10): 54-70.

Harvey, D. (1989) The Urban Experience. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Harvey, D. (2006) Paris, Capital of Modernity. New York: Routledge.

Hawkes, T. (2003) Structuralism and Semiotics. London: Routledge

Jackson, J. B. (1984) Discovering the Vernacular Landscape. New Haven: Yale

   University Press.

Jacobson, R. (1960) "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in T. A. Sebeok (ed)

   Style In Language, pp. 350-77. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jakobson, R. (1972) 'Verbal Communication', in Scientific American (ed)

   Communication, pp. 39-44. San Francisco: Freeman.

King, A. D. (1996) Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the Twenty-

   First Century Metropolis. London: Macmillan.

Knowles, C. and Harper, D. (2009) Hong Kong: Migrant Lives, Landscapes, and

   Journeys. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Krase, J. (1997) "The Spatial Semiotics of Little Italies and Italian Americans," Pp. 98-127 in Industry, Technology, Labor and the Italian American Communities, edited by Mario Aste, et al. Staten Island, New York: American Italian Historical Association.

Krase, J. (2002) 'Navigating Ethnic Vernacular Landscapes Then and Now', Journal of Architecture and Planning Research 19(4): 274-281.

Krase, J. (2003) 'Italian American Urban Landscapes: Images of Social and Cultural Capital', Italian Americana 22(1): 17-44.

Krase, J. and Hum, T. (2007) 'Ethnic Crossroads: Toward a Theory of Immigrant Global Neighborhoods', in R. Hutchinson and J. Krase (eds) Ethnic Landscapes in an Urban World, pp 97-119. Amsterdam: Elsevier/JAI Press.

Krase, J. and Shortell, T. (2007) 'Imagining Chinatowns and Little Italies: a Visual Approach to Ethnic Spectacles', paper presented at Le Beau Dans La Ville: Colloque International, Tours, November.

Krase, J. and Shortell, T. (2008) 'Visualizing Glocalization: Changing Images of Ethnic Vernacular Neighborhoods in Global Cities', paper presented at the First ISA Forum of Sociology, Barcelona, September.

Krase, J. and Shortell, T. (2009) 'Visualizing Glocalization: Semiotics of Ethnic and Class Differences in Global Cities', paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, Baltimore, March.

Lefevbre, H. (1991) The Production of Space, translated by D. Nicholson-Smith. Malden: Blackwell.

Lofland, L. (2003) 'Community and Urban Life', in L. T. Reynolds and N. J. Herman-
   Kinnery. (eds) Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism, pp. 937-974. Lanham:
   AltaMira.

Lofland, L. (1985) A World of Strangers: Order and Action in Urban Public Spaces.
   Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Lynch, K. (1960) The Image of the City. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Osterhammel, J. and Petersson, M. P. (2005) Globalization: A Short History, translated
   by D. Geyer. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Pan, L. (2009) 'Dissecting Multilingual Beijing: The Space and Scale of Vernacular
   Globalization.' Visual Communication, 9(1): 67-90.

Pauwels, L. (2008) 'An integrated model for conceptualising visual competence in
   scientific research and communication', Visual Studies 23(2):147-161.

Prosser, J. and Schwartz, D. (1998) 'Photographs within the sociological research
   process', in J. Prosser (ed) Image-based Research: A Sourcebook for Qualitative
   Researchers, pp. 115-130. London: Routledge.

Robertson, R. (1997) 'Comments on the "global triad" and "glocalization"', in I.
   Nobutaka (ed) Globalization and Indigenous Culture, (assessed October, 2007)
   http://www2.kokugakuin.ac.jp/ijcc/wp/global/index.html

Shortell, T. and Krase, J. (2009) 'Spatial Semiotics of Difference in Urban Vernacular
   Neighborhoods', paper presented at the 9th European Sociological Association
   Conference, Lisbon, September.

Simmel. G. (1908/1924) 'Sociology of the Senses: Visual Interaction,' in Robert E. Park
and Ernest W. Burgess (eds) Introduction to the Science of Sociology, pp. 356-61.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Warren, C. A. B. and Karner, T. X. (2005) Discovering Qualitative Methods: Field
Research, Interviews and Analysis. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing.

Zukin, Sharon. 1996. "Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline," Pp. 43-59 in Re-
Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the Twenty-First Century
Metropolis, edited by Anthony D. King. New York: NYU Press.