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Making sense of visual pollution: The “Clean City” law in São Paulo, Brazil

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Introduction

The impact of human activity on the Earth has been a central environmental concern throughout contemporary history. One of the main challenges of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) is to reverse the damage we are doing to the planet through climate change and industrial pollution (National Research Council 2012). The focus of this chapter is on a perhaps less known type of harm – visual pollution. Unlike other forms of sensory pollution, such as noise and light pollution, visual pollution has not been extensively studied, nor have its impacts been assessed. Despite this, the term “visual pollution” has been increasingly used in the Americas and it is central to São Paulo’s “Clean City” law (Lei Cidade Limpa).

The “Clean City” law was enacted in April 2007. The legislation requires the removal of commercial advertisements in public areas. It also restricts the use of signage on building facades and prohibits graffiti in order to “protect citizens’ rights to clean public spaces” free of visual pollution (law no. 14.223, 2006; Harris 2007). Pollution, as understood within toxicity studies, is a by-product of society’s industrial and economic development and its ensuing impact on nature and society. However, it is important to question the specificity of visual pollution as these visualities are often the cultural output of a given society: “Now

more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think ‘transversally’” (Guattari 2014, 29). Perhaps one of the main challenges of this kind of pollution is to think about the methodologies that can consider the problem “transversally,” and therefore analyze the intersection between pollution, culture, and society.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate the urgent need for this type of transversal thought, especially since Brazil’s election of Jair Bolsonaro as president in late 2018. Since coming into power, Bolsonaro’s political measures have given rise to national indignation (Phillips 2019). However, it was his Amazon exploration proposal at the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos that caused international outrage (Shear and Haberman 2019). Bolsonaro’s discourse on the environment and his ideas on the commercialization of the Amazon show the dangers of post-truth politics, not only by acting as a climate change denier but also by undermining the agencies responsible for environment protection: the president’s response to criticism of the policy was to state that “What is damaging Brazil’s image is the permanent and well-orchestrated defamation campaign by NGOs and supposed experts, within and outside of Brazil” (Kaiser 2019).

Bolsonaro’s post-truth discourse demonstrates the need for a stronger understanding of the relationship between pollution, culture, and society; this will be further exemplified as I follow Clean City’s fight against visual pollution and discuss how each political administration in São Paulo has understood the law – and subsequently visual pollution – given the lack of framework around the legislation and the concept itself. This analysis is crucial as these different understandings of visual pollution have an impact on São Paulo’s residents, both as producers of visual pollution and those experiencing it (Figure 7.1).

For my conclusion, I will discuss the methodology used during qualitative research done in São Paulo in 2014 and how new and innovative ways of sensing the city, including the use of citizen science as a methodological practice, can help investigate how different structures of experience are perceived within the same urban reality. The multidisciplinary approach to the research presented in this project is a technique critical for assessing the impact of visual pollution, consequently informing frameworks to regulate the use of the public space.

Clean City law and São Paulo’s fight against pollution

In 2007, São Paulo received media attention around the world as the first global city to ban advertisements (The Economist 2007). The Clean City law,

7.1 São Paulo's buildings with covered billboards, graffiti, and pixo, found at Via Elevado Pres. João Goulart where the author conducted some of the interviews. Photo by Marina Da Silva.

approved by mayor Gilberto Kassab, was part of a “bigger” fight against the city’s pollution. Arguably, São Paulo is better known for its air and water pollution problems. To contextualize this environmental paradox, air pollution, which is caused by the city’s severe car traffic issues, causes more deaths per year than car accidents (globo.com 2013). Water pollution from São Paulo’s main rivers – Pinheiros and Tietê – not only added to the city’s unpleasant smell but also aggravated the unprecedented drought in São Paulo back in 2015 (Romero 2015). Despite the evident need to address air and water pollution in São Paulo, Mayor Kassab started his “fight” on pollution by dealing with what he described as “the most conspicuous sector – the visual” (Bevins 2010).

The Clean City law was acknowledged and celebrated all over the world, winning awards in China (Expo Shanghai, 2010), the United States (Emotional Branding Visionary Award, 2011), Germany (Werkbund-Label, 2012), and the United Kingdom (Brit Insurance Design of the Year, 2008). São Paulo’s Clean City law seemed to have started an urban design revolution, but how does it relate to the idea of pollution more broadly? In other words, if visual pollution has not been assessed or measured as per other kinds of pollution present in the city, such as air and water, it is safe to assume that neither has its impact, on both the social and natural environment. Therefore it is important to question the criteria used by São Paulo’s government to decide which pollution to deal with first.

Clean City was radical and unique in its absolutist stance: the changes required by this law had to be actioned within 60 days (law no. 14.223, 2006). Interestingly, São Paulo was not the first to impose such measures; other places, including Hawaii (the 1920s), Vermont (1968), Maine (early 1980s), and Alaska (1998) have taken similar actions (Mahdawi 2015). However, unlike other legislation, Clean City was the first to officially classify these visualities as *pollution* and such an advertisement ban was unprecedented in a global city.

It is important to note that despite classifying advertisements, signage, and graffiti as visual pollution, the term itself *is not defined* in Clean City, nor has any research been done regarding the possible impact on the environment. Currently, the most extensive analysis on the topic is by Adriana Portella, in *Visual Pollution: Advertising, Signage and Environmental Quality* (2014). Portella describes visual pollution as “an established expression commonly used to describe the degradation of the visual quality of places by signage” (Portella 2014, 1). However, what Clean City classifies as “visual pollution” seems to suggest that the degradation of public space also occurs as a result of advertisements and graffiti, visualities often found in a typical globalized urban space.

How is visual pollution situated within other types of sensory pollution?

Visual pollution, as a type of multimodal environmental degradation, should be analyzed in relation to other types of sensory pollution commonly found in the urban environment, such as light (Longcore and Rich 2004) and noise pollution (Fong 2016). Light pollution impacts the behavior of humans and animals by interfering with their circadian rhythms and physiological behavior; noise pollution (from transport, industry, and neighbors) disrupts complex task performance, modifies social behavior, and causes annoyance (Stansfeld and Matheson 2003). Unlike other types of sensory pollution, visual pollution cannot be easily measured since the *visual* element of this kind of pollution has not been agreed upon and therefore no threshold has been determined. This is now particularly problematic due to the expansion of targeted advertising and the blurred lines created by the commodification of culture (Jameson 2009) between graffiti, street art, and advertisement.

Extensive studies have shown the negative impact of air and water pollution on the quality of life in São Paulo, yet we do not see any radical ban on vehicles or tougher regulations on industrial waste disposal. The same can be said for light and noise pollution, so how can legislation be approved on such an unknown type of pollution? The impact of advertising (Baudrillard 1998; Cronin 2010), signage (Sennett 1990; Klein 2009), and graffiti (Cresswell 1992; Ferrell 1995) has been widely discussed, albeit these visualities as a collective – and more importantly, *as a sensory pollution* – have not been analyzed. Arguably more important and tractable pollution issues have been sidelined or avoided by São Paulo's government in focusing both their own and the public's attention on this issue instead. I believe it is important to analyze how visual pollution is being understood by those who enforce Clean City in order to understand how the political agenda is shaping São Paulo's urban space.

How has “visual pollution” been understood by different administrations in São Paulo?

My research has looked into how the different political administrations interpreted Clean City and how this has impacted the idea of visual pollution. Since the law's enactment, the city's urban space has changed dramatically. The law was originally developed by the urban planner Regina Monteiro to allow the

creation of a *single* visual order in a city that grew up quickly and without a defined urban plan (Estadão 2013).

Clean City was meant to redefine the city's visual public space by banning advertisements, controlling the sizing of signage, and removing graffiti. These visualities, commonly found in post-industrialized metropolitan areas, were then meant to be reintroduced, albeit in an organized form, creating a better balance between the city's visual communication and the urban space. The enforcement of Clean City and the understanding of visual pollution has changed across different political administrations. In the age of post-truth, where expert analyses have been continuously and openly ridiculed, how can the different interpretations of visual pollution ever be solved? This is particularly pertinent in the era of President Bolsonaro, who has denigrated the role of experts in relation to several pertinent environmental issues. Below I will detail the contrasting interpretations of the law accordingly to each political mandate and the issues around it.

Gilberto Kassab, the mayor who officialized Clean City, came to power on March 31, 2006. With the promise to address the city's pollution, Clean City's visual cleanse seemed to fit the bill. The law was then appropriated under Gilberto Kassab's fight against the city's pollution; Clean City seemed to be the first step against the commercialization of public space (Sennett 1990; Klein 2009), which seemed to be against Kassab's economic agenda that focused on economical liberalism.

By enforcing Clean City, Kassab was in direct conflict with small businesses owners, billboard printers, and media agencies, with many claiming that the legislation was going to destroy their lives (Folha de São Paulo 2007). Ironically, the only sector that did not seem to mind the advertising ban was advertising. They not only embraced the legislation but also praised it: Claudio Lima, head of Ogilvy Advertising, said that despite the losses, "Clean City was ultimately a good idea for the city." A possible explanation for this is that the billboard removal was happening simultaneously with an increased use of social media and tailored advertising. In an interview for the *Financial Times* in 2010, Marcio Oliveira, Lew'Lara/TBWA's vice president of operations said: "The internet was the really big winner" (Bevins 2010).

However, advertising was not the only kind of visibility to be banned by Clean City; there are still discussions on what types of graffiti are allowed. São Paulo is a world reference for graffiti art, with its two distinctive styles: there are the famous colorful illustrations, but there is also a distinct kind of graffiti called "pixo," which is a type of tagging. Pixo is overwhelmingly present in the city's urban landscape and started to appear in the 1980s as a protest against the military dictatorship. Pixo is now seen as a tool of resistance against the disenfranchisement created by São Paulo's wealth disparity.

A crucial question, then, is who decides which of the above is graffiti art or vandalism? São Paulo's visual pollution removal is currently outsourced at great public cost; the lack of defined guidelines in the legislation allows the "cleaning" company the responsibility for that distinction as they remove what they personally consider visual pollution to be. This controversy over "Clean City" was documented in the film *Cidade Cinza* (Grey City, 2013) by Marcelo Mesquita and Guilherme Valiengo. The documentary follows the discussion about the usage of São Paulo's public space and the role of graffiti as art and as social expression, culminating in the removal of a 75-foot-long (23 meters) mural created by a street art collective without warning under the enforcement of Clean City; this decision was taken by the cleaning company, not by city hall. This happened while "osGemeos" (two artists from the collective) were exhibiting at the Tate Modern, which was used as an argument to show the cultural value of this type of visuality. The media coverage was extensive and supportive of the mural and, in the end, Kassab was forced to recommission a new mural.

At the same time, "pixo" is removed on a daily basis without any front-page news. The documentary *Pixo* (2010), directed by João Wainer and Roberto T. Oliveira, is similar to *Grey City*, in that it follows *pixadores* (pixo artists) in order to understand their views on urban space ownership and how the act of "spraying" is a way to be seen in a society that ignores their social class. The *pixadores* want to intervene in the public space by "marking" the city. According to the film, unlike graffiti artists, their aim is not to create but to destroy.

The distinction between these two types of graffiti was once more made official by another piece of legislation created after Clean City, namely law no. 12.408 distinguishing *pichação* (vandalism) from graffiti as street art in São Paulo. This validates the general understanding that one kind is street art and the other is visual pollution (Dias 2016). Interestingly, graffiti and street artists have been allowed by the government to be sponsored by companies, once again blurring the line between art and advertisement.

Kassab's successor, Fernando Haddad (mayor 2013–2016, Workers' Party [Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT]), presented a manifesto focused on the social aspect of the city, which included a series of cultural proposals. The most controversial cultural measure of Haddad's administration was the authorization of a historical space called "Arcos do Jânio" (Jânio's Arches) to be used for street art. Haddad aimed to make São Paulo the world's biggest "open-air street art museum." The reappropriation of this place for a democratic purpose seemed to be a positive action. However, there is no public record of the parameters for how the artists and artworks were selected, adding once again to the problem of artistic validation of the different types of graffiti present in São Paulo.

As well as housing the biggest open-air museum, São Paulo also boasts South America's largest LED screen building facade, which can be found adorning the FIESP Cultural Center in Avenida Paulista. In 2016 the building facade was used to protest against former president Dilma Rousseff; the building is managed by Paulo Skaf, a member of PMDB-SP and opposed to Rousseff's government. Skaf authorized the use of the screen facade to protest against the government, which was a direct violation of Clean City, as the law states that no ideological message can be displayed in the public space. The removal of the protest artwork was interpreted by the media as an action taken by Haddad to protect Rousseff, as they shared the same party, and not because it is stipulated by the law.

Despite Haddad's commitment to the cultural development of São Paulo's urban space, it was also during his management that Clean City was "softened." Brands were allowed to "sponsor" bus shelters, meaning they were permitted to have advertisements on the side of the shelters while being responsible for the maintenance of the structure. Haddad's interpretation of Clean City and visual pollution was contradictory: he allowed São Paulo's residents to own the space that had been reclaimed by Clean City, but he also allowed the introduction of advertisements and corporate sponsorship.

The next mayor was João Dória (mayor 2017 to the time of writing, member of the Brazilian Social Democracy Party [Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, PSDB]). His first public commitment was to implement an operation called "Cidade Linda" (Beautiful City) which he described as the "largest action towards the visual rehabilitation of the city." Dressed as a refuse collector at an organized press conference, he promised to clean the streets once a week. His first "cleaning" lasted 10 seconds (Exame 2017).

Beautiful City aims to protect and clean the city's urban space, which also includes landscaping the city's green areas. It is important to point out that this program actively includes public participation in the maintenance of sidewalks by organizing "multirões," which can be translated as "community collective effort." During one of his multirões, he covered a series of graffitied walls with grey paint. He also authorized the removal of the graffiti art from Jânio's Arches without any consent from the cultural preservation sectors of the government; the open-air museum created by Haddad has been closed. As tension grew, so did the fines for whoever was caught "spraying" on the walls.

Dória is also responsible for what has been described as the "biggest urban privatisation of São Paulo" (POPS) (Flynn and Simões 2017). If Clean City was softened during Haddad's administration, under Dória's new program it will become virtually nonexistent. He plans to allow advertising on all privatized areas of São Paulo. What this essentially means is that São Paulo's public space will become privately owned, and this will give grounds to allow private

authorization of the visual material in the city. Who will be deciding what constitutes visual pollution then? The company that owns that space or the city? How will the changing views on visual pollution interfere with its citizens' rights?

This question becomes particularly relevant when discussing perhaps the most contested measure toward São Paulo's beautification authorized by Dória: the cover-up of areas inhabited by the homeless community below São Paulo's viaducts. This action, according to the mayor, was meant to protect them from the weather. However, reports from within his government suggest that this was actually done to hide them from the rest of São Paulo's urban space. We can, then, speculate on how the idea of visual pollution can be exploited and how it can impact on important issues such as the environmental justice of São Paulo's population. The number of homeless people has grown 10% in four years (Veja 2015). What these examples demonstrate is that visual pollution needs to be properly assessed in order to understand its impact on the social and natural environment.

Is visual pollution more than a sensory issue?

Despite their very disparate political ideologies, São Paulo's mayors seem to have one overall point in common: the beautification of São Paulo's urban space. Perhaps this fixation with the beautification of São Paulo has its roots in the rivalry with Rio de Janeiro, *Cidade Maravilhosa*, translated as "the marvellous city." Rio de Janeiro is known for its *natural* beauty, unlike São Paulo, which is better known for its "concrete jungle." But are these urban projects connected to pollution at all?

What São Paulo's example demonstrates is that visual pollution, *as a term*, has been widely accepted, even though it has not been understood as pollution *per se*. By including the term in Clean City, Gilberto Kassab has officialized visual pollution in the mainstream of environmental discourse, albeit as a normative concept. In other words, we may all have a general understanding about what is the visual and what is pollution, but not what they mean together.

Clean City highlights an issue already anticipated by Georg Simmel in 1903 in his seminal essay "Metropolis and the Mental Life" in which he discusses the effect of hyper-visual stimulation in a metropolis – the "Blasé outlook" – which is the point where the individual can no longer react to new stimulation (1976). Simmel's argument, which is framed within theories of consumerism, is that this stimulation would reach its peak with the concentration of purchasable goods, and that would generate an outlet of nervous energy where the individual could

no longer react to new stimulation. The critique of mental invasion by advertising has been widely discussed (Baudrillard 1998; Klein 2009; Cronin 2010). But are we being over visually stimulated only by advertisements?

São Paulo's law is creating a new urban identity: a "clean" space free from commercial communication, signage, and graffiti. Yet this radical urban cleansing does not consider how the classification of cultural production impacts the different creators of these visualities and their relation to the social space. Given how the production of space is a politically contested field that determines who we are as a society (Lefebvre 1991), it is essential to question who decides what a "visually clean" urban public space is and how this type of ban affects society.

The Clean City law raises questions about how the visual appearance and experience of a city comes about (Sennett 1990) and how this sensory pollution is affecting and shaping the urban environment and, more importantly, society. The lack of definition or theoretical frameworks leaves the idea of visual pollution vulnerable to personal interpretation as well as possible misuse, as seen in São Paulo's different administrations. This suggests the importance of understanding the specificity of framing or classifying these elements as pollution, and how visual pollution is made to exist and subsequently experienced as such. As Eriksen (1995, 246) explains, "Systems of classification allow us to mentally structure our surroundings to understand its relation to socially pre-defined categories and types." How this classification impacts the categories where these visualities are embedded gives us essential understanding of how we perceive the impact of visual pollution, especially as the idea of a visual quality can be related to judgments of taste (Bourdieu 1984), and how pollution functions as a social symbol of order (Douglas 1966), thus making the aesthetic perception and the classification as pollution both political and ideological issues.

In order to understand the role of these visual stimuli, we need to reconsider what kinds of methods can be put in place to investigate the physiological and sociological effect of visual pollution. The creation of such methods requires citizen participation. Perhaps the most relevant process for this type of inquiry is considering a multimodal approach to research, including citizen science, qualitative research, and ethnography as a way to analyze how classification as pollution impacts different actors and their agencies.

Visual pollution and the city: Sensing different modes of experience

In 2014, I conducted a series of urban walks in São Paulo in order to analyze residents' impressions of a hypothetical urban space without visual pollution.

Moreover, I was hoping to understand whether the removal of adverts and graffiti had had an impact on their experience of that space. And São Paulo's space is a unique one: the "concrete jungle" holds the world's 12th largest population, and it is formed by a total of 7,216 high-rise buildings, almost double the number in London, which has 3,216 (Emporis 2018). It is therefore important to think about what a visual-pollution-free dense urban space might look like.

Walking through this urban jungle was not easy; most *paulistanos* (a term used to describe São Paulo's residents), drive or use public transport (which is mainly determined by their economic status) as the city is spread over a vast area. Driving gives a completely different sensorial experience of the city. Performing this urban sensory ethnography was a way to understand how people sense the space, and more importantly, to explore if the removal of visual pollution had made São Paulo's space less sensorily overloaded.

The advertisements had been removed, but everything else banned by Clean City could still be seen in São Paulo's public space. The main method of research I used were "city walks," which is an immersive type of mobile interview (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). The participants were randomly chosen and represented different sociocultural backgrounds. The walks took place in Consolação Avenue, from metro station Paulista to metro República. This path was chosen because it connects the city's main avenue (Avenida Paulista), to República Square, which is the beginning of São Paulo's historical center and one of the most deprived areas of the city. Consolação Avenue was chosen as it has a mixture of residential and commercial spaces, where you can witness different types of visualities, all of which are banned by Clean City.

During the walks, I invited the participants to perform their own visual ethnography of São Paulo's urban space. They could photograph it, draw it, film it, or merely describe it as a way to immerse them in São Paulo's urban space. The approach was particularly relevant due to São Paulo's residents' specific relationship to the city: the city has little pedestrian infrastructure, so most people do not dwell in the urban space, often experiencing the city from inside their cars or from underground transport. Their behavior in the city is mediated; residents avoid urban noise (which São Paulo has in abundance) and do not experience the urban space from a pedestrian's viewpoint. City walking was a strategy used to make the participants explore the different types of stimuli present in the city's urban space, to help analyze how visual pollution can be defined and separated from other sensorial stimuli.

The elements photographed by the participants make this sensorial tension visible; it is an ongoing cultural negotiation present in São Paulo's public space, accepted and understood as part of the city's "chaotic" identity. The sensorial data showed that despite agreeing that Clean City was a positive measure, there

was no agreement on what makes a specific visual communication a pollutant. For some, it was a quantitative issue – there were just too many advertisements – but for most, the classification as pollution was influenced by their personal taste, as per the extracts below:

Visual pollution, in my opinion, is everything that makes what you see ugly or unattractive because we can't deny that beauty is good for the soul. (Sebastiana)

Visual pollution is a visual intervention that shouldn't be there ... like pixo, graffiti not so much, but pixo I think it's horrible, I get that it's a social movement ... I guess it is something ugly on the top of something that is already awful, the city is ugly. (Oscar)

The photographs taken by the participants suggest that their judgment of taste influence their definition of visual pollution. However, that judgment is accompanied by a general understanding of visual pollution as a social expression. Therefore, São Paulo's society is "visually polluting" the built environment (either with graffiti or "pixo") as way to resist the harm done by the economic and political system. The idea of excess of visual elements in São Paulo's urban space could be a way to narrow the idea of visual pollution and to encourage reflections about the city's public space ownership and social agency. Interestingly, this same excess, chaos, and mess construct São Paulo's multiple identities.

If we agree that aesthetic judgments are connected to one's personal views and therefore subjective, should we try to understand these judgments from the point of view of their agency? This, perhaps, is a better angle for analysis, as per Max Liboiron's research on plastic pollution in oceans, where she affirms that "objects have agency and they influence other things around them and in relation to each other. Objects also have politics and are entangled in struggles of power and meaning" (Latour 2007; Coole and Frost 2010; Liboiron 2015). In order to understand the relation between the meaning of these visuals and their impact, it is essential to analyze the agency of advertisements with regard to other types of visual pollution (e.g., commercial signage and graffiti as in Clean City), and its relation to the public space to assess its harmful effect on society.

Previous research into visual pollution has focused on the mapping of visual communications, which are mainly billboards and signage. A group of researchers in Poland aims to give citizens the chance to collect and inform data on the subject (Chmielewski et al. 2016) by allowing the mapping of visual pollution using phone apps and feeding the results into an open-source website. The app is defined on their website as a type of citizen science, but are these citizen sensing practices showing new modes of experience or just cataloguing the quantity of advertisements?

How can citizen-gathered sensing be used to significantly impact environmental politics? Given the importance of public space in social relations (Lefebvre 1991) and in environmental issues (Wolch et al. 2014), it is important to reflect on the relational cause between the different visualities present within it, and – more importantly – how this can be translated. São Paulo’s municipal law is a unique opportunity to observe visual pollution, to understand the consequences of such a classification (Douglas and Hull 1994), and to collect data to develop frameworks for its application.

How can we expand the methodology used and distributed to the public in order to understand this unique type of pollution? My research aims to solve this by being multidisciplinary and inventive (Lury and Wakeford 2012) and deploying different sensory methods (Rose 2001) such as photography, videos, and soundscapes.

The data analysis is not only textual but also visualized as an immersive installation (borrowing from art techniques) in order to explore different modes of existence in the city, to speculate on the connection between the individual’s perception of public space and the social dynamics created by visual communication in the cityscape, and investigate how different structures of experience and consciousness are visualized within the same urban realities. The installation, informed by the fieldwork data, creates a physical, embodied, situated experience and is an attempt to encourage the audience to critically reflect on how different actors are influencing the choices made in São Paulo’s public space and therefore how society’s changing views on “visual pollution” can interfere with the democratic use and creation of the public space.

Conclusion

São Paulo’s case study demonstrates empirically the issues caused by the lack of frameworks on visual pollution, and furthermore how other, better-understood pollution issues have not been dealt with due to the politicians’ populist environmental agenda in São Paulo, which is now echoed in wider national politics in Brazil. The different interpretations of Clean City suggest that the term *visual pollution* has not been properly investigated or assessed.

This becomes evident through analysis of the initial enforcement of Clean City by Gilberto Kassab (2006–2013), where all advertising was removed, to the next mayor, Fernando Haddad, who supported the legislation (despite allowing advertisements to be reintroduced) but did not consider graffiti to be visual pollution, and, finally, the time of the current mayor, João Dória (2017–present), where all types of graffiti are considered pollution (unless sponsored

by known brands), adding a further layer to the aestheticization of São Paulo's urban space through the creation of the new program, Beautiful City, which included, for some, the covering up of the homeless in the city.

The never-ending quest for a more "beautiful" São Paulo shows how complex and potentially misunderstood the concept of visual pollution is. The politics behind the classification of visual communication as pollution reveals social and spatial inequalities, including social exclusion and marginalization of its producers. Which voices count in the debate about graffiti as street art or as vandalism? More importantly, it is essential to ask whether the law actually protects citizens' rights for clean urban spaces or whether it is affecting their sense of environmental justice, as speculated in the example of the "cleaning up" of homelessness in São Paulo.

It is undeniable that the urban environment has become saturated with all kinds of visualities, billboards, graffiti, street art, and even buildings. However, how we understand these visual stimuli as pollution has not yet been fully researched. The larger and more populated the urban environment becomes, the more we will notice the increasing amount of pollution that impact our senses, and ultimately health, both physically and mentally. Arguably, certain sensory pollutions (light and noise) can be measured in relation to an average perception of that stimulation and changing behavioral patterns. However, the assessment of visual pollution presents many challenges; the contrasting perceptions of visual cultural production calls for a set of inventive methodologies to measure and understand the different impacts of these visual stimuli, not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively.

The empirical work done in São Paulo's public space in 2014 raises questions about the continuous negotiation that the different types of visualities and their producers have in the production of that space (Lefebvre 1991), and therefore how the control of such visuals impacts this new space. The data collected during the initial fieldwork raised important questions on the understanding of these visuals as a collective and in degradation (pollution?) of the urban space, on the role that graffiti played in São Paulo's urban spaces, and how this relates to other environmental issues. The sensorial ethnographic data from the "city walks" was used on an installation that reinterpreted modes of experience of the urban space, as an attempt to incite the audience to critically reflect on society's (changing) views on visual pollution and how different structures of experience are perceived within the same urban reality.

The rise of visual pollution in the Anthropocene seems understandable since we are living in a time where visual cultural production is increasingly prioritized. Therefore, understanding how this phenomenon could be causing us harm is crucial, especially when the term comprises different problematics. São

Paulo's law validated a new concept – visual pollution – and in doing so has acted as a controlling tool on the public space, infringing on ideas of freedom and environmental justice. Clean City demonstrates the urgent need to further expand the concept of pollution and to understand other types of sensorial pollution – not only how to measure visual pollution but also how visual pollution impacts society.

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