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Intentional Camera Movement: A Multisensory and Mobile Photographic Technique to Investigate the Urban Tourism Experience

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Abstract

By using an autoethnographic perspective, the aim of the present article is to develop a nuanced vocabulary for understanding and performing visuality in relation to the photographic practices of tourists in urbanscapes. Drawing from photography as part of multisensory processes experienced through the interconnection of the senses and images as moving trajectories, this study experimented with Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) as a potential specific photographic technique to examine tourist photographs in relation to urbanscape shots and, more broadly, to critique the pervasive privilege of sight. Furthermore, ICM aims to develop a critical-creative style to evoke (rather than illustrate) the experience of moving-through urban tourist spaces at a time of mobile media and ubiquitous digital cameras.

1. Introduction

The proliferation of mobile phones, digital cameras and a range of other portable media, has led to a continuous change in the nature of tourists' photographic practices (Larsen, 2006). It would appear that nowadays, no angle remains unphotographed. The pervasiveness of camera phones (Horst and Hjorth, 2014) and the visual nature of our world, require re-examining the photographic practices of tourists, as well as the ethnographic and knowledge production surrounding them. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to develop a more nuanced vocabulary for understanding and performing visuality (Merri-

man et al., 2008) in relation to tourism and photography. Drawing from photography as part of multisensory processes and images as moving trajectories, this study experiments with Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) as a potential specific technique to investigate tourist photographs in relation to urbanscape shots and, more broadly, to critique the pervasive privilege of sight.

The current discussion emerges from a shared working project by a photographer and a tourism scholar (who wrote this study) based in Barcelona and Venice. The study interweaves personal and ethnographical experiences with art and

geographical knowledge, and it seeks to sympathise with that strand of work in geographic production that uses the descriptive power of photography as an active, even disruptive, part of the reasoning process (Rose, 2008). Based on this, the rest of the paper unfolds as follows. First, I go over some important theoretical points on tourist photographic practices and photography in general to provide the proper background for the article. Following that, I discuss the process that led us to consider ICM photography as a useful tool to approach such an argument. Then, I provide some examples of ICM photographs. I conclude by suggesting that this creative approach is useful to develop hidden potentialities in photography and, subsequently, to carry out geographical investigations.

2. An overview on tourism and photography

It seems that to be a tourist implies that pictures will be taken. Of course this is nothing new. Forty years ago, Susan Sontag's work *On Photography* (1977:9) notably touched on this topic. The author argues that 'it seems positively unnatural to travel for pleasure without taking a camera along' and that photography dramatically transforms the perception of the world, turning it into a society of spectacles, in which reality becomes an item for visual consumption. Since then the relationship between tourism, tourists and photography has long been an interest of cultural researchers. As indicated by Sontag (1977), tourists use their cameras to possess the place that they visit, relieving their anxieties about being in a foreign environment. Hence, attempts have been made to create a general frame on tourists' photography practices. The conviction of "consuming" a place through the camera became a shared inclination between critical tourism and visual scholarly, while the standardisation of tourists as "people with cameras" spread throughout academic works of tourism theory (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990). In addition, photography also has been a constituent element of other academic strands whose focus is to demonstrate how the tourism industry works through signs and images (e.g., Mirzoeff, 1998). This is well summarised in the concept of the

"circle of representation" suggested by Urry in his *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), which states that tourists' photographs both reflect and inform destination images. Tourists try to reproduce the iconic images of a destination in their own photos, which serve as evidence to display their version of what they saw before their visit. Tourists create an image before visiting the destination and, once there, they gaze upon an ideal representation of the pre-experience spot. According to the author, tourists travel searching for specific shots from travel brochures or postcards to capture nearly identical images as photos. If this might sound too strict, according to the co-authored third edition of *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Urry and Larsen, 2011), the authors offer a much broader reconceptualisation. They argue that the tourist gaze is also about 'embodied and mobile practices', and they highlight that 'each gaze depends upon practices and material relations as upon discourses and signs'. Larsen (2006) also argues that tourist photography is a performed, rather than preformed, practice. He suggests that the intertwining of tourist and photography has a composite 'theatrical nature, which involves corporeal, staged and enacted imaginative geographies'. Tourist photographers are thus choreographed by images, but their picturing practices are not fully determined by this scripting. Tourism phenomena and practices are defined as embodied and situated as a large amount of academic work sought to highlight (Crang, 1997; Crouch, 2000; Edensor, 2000).

Alongside this, new debates on photography have emerged. Photographs have been defined as part of multisensory environments, experienced through the interconnection of the senses (Pink, 2011). In addition, thanks to new technologies, photography presents a hybrid character of technical and social aspects and its hybrid performances by corporeal humans affording 'non-humans' (Larsen, 2006) permits to take, to post-process and finally share the images all on the same device, almost at the same time. Such reasoning shall then be connected to Massey's (2005) statements on images. According to her, photos are not 'of' place or stopping points. Rather, they are inevitably and obligatory 'in' places, produced by moving through environments. This means shifting away from the common-sense idea that

a photograph stands for a static surface (Pink, 2011). In this sense, visual events are created through movement, stand for movement and are viewed in movement. They are part of new 'constellations of processes' (Massey, 2005) in a world that is always in forward motion. Thus, people engage with photographs corporeally and sensorially (Pinney, 2009). Pictures, produced and consumed, become intertwined with the trajectories of moving, and they both emerge from, and are implicated in, the production of the event of place (Pink, 2011).

Given all these developments and leaving academic debate aside for a moment, queues of tourists still, however, can be seen in many cultural capitals, waiting to take the 'classic' shot of a building or urban landscape (Picard and Robinson, 2009). Destinations are characterised by markers that identify the places that are worth seeing and the fact that most urban tourists are often concentrated within a very limited area is evidence of that. Common modern practices played out by tourists include taking pictures of a specific attraction or iconic objects while walking and without stopping, or waiting until people get out of the frame, sometimes suffering the frustration of not achieving the proper frame and not capturing the essence, thereby making the sight 'unphotographable' (Garlick, 2011) or taking a bad photo. Such behaviours are also remarkably parodied in some famous photographs by Martin Parr (2012), as well as in a few reflections on his blog[1]:

One thing that has really changed in recent years is how the tourist uses photography. […] Now mobile phone cameras and digital photography mean that the entire visit is documented. […] So I am under the impression that no one is really paying attention to the splendours and beauties of the site, as the urge to photograph is so overwhelming.

Parr wrote his blog after a visit to Barcelona and, as stated through his words, several cities still lend themselves easily to a feverish pursuit by tourists to photograph the most famous attractions as holiday evidence. This method of acting indicates that the notion of the 'tourist gaze' remains relevant and highlights the privileging of the visuality and ocular centrism of modernity. Supported by new technologies such as tablets and smartphones, the visual consumption of tourist destinations leads people to take pictures more and more rapidly, while performing their urban experience within clustered, urban tourist spaces (of course, the concept of cluster city can represent some urban centres better than others). Even if performed rather than preformed (Larsen, 2006), the belief that photographs record a piece of reality is a central aspect in the tourist's effort to catalogue the world. The basis of this, of course, lies in the social nature of the photograph, which embodies a specific method of seeing (Garlick, 2011). In other words, it is mainly the sight that comes to be recognised as the only possible way of acknowledging (Costello, 2012; Heidegger, 1977; Garlick, 2011).

Given all this and intertwining our positionalities (being ourselves a researcher, a photographer and inevitably tourists as well in our lives), our purpose was to look for a way to perform photography that can clarify the concept of photos as part of a multisensory process (Massey, 2005; Pink, 2011). Indeed, it has to be said that some recent important attempts have been made to call into attention accidental, unexpected or overexposed photos, taken during interrails, as part of the hectic everyday tourism experience (Jensen, 2016); nonetheless, here we move from the analysis to the production of images. Hence, the point will be if there is an alternative visual practice that could make explicit how photographs are emplaced and experienced in movement inside tourist urbanscapes.

3. Approaching the methodology: an autoethnographic account

The present research is the result of a shared effort by a tourism scholar and a photographer, taking place in two of the most touristificated urban contexts in Europe, Barcelona and Venice, where millions of tourists go to visit; both locations of the fieldwork and cities in which we have lived for a long time. This is precisely what (being first inhabitants and subsequently tourists

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[1] https://www.martinparr.com/2012/too-much-photography/.

in these cultural capitals) allowed us to approach the present issue of photographic practices in tourist urbanscapes with such a different sensitivity. Sometimes our daily walks to certain places were, and still are, in a way, "hindered" by a flow of people who did not pay attention to other passers-by, too busy taking picture of some architectural details, iconic objects or other attractions.

The overcrowding of the most-beaten tracks, especially at certain times of the years, fed our desire to visually document these photographic practices, specifically those in which tourists do not stop to accurately frame fellow travellers, but instead use their smartphones or tablets to take 'mobile' photos of the different hotspots. At the very beginning, we asked ourselves whether this style of photography, which epitomises the aforementioned "unphotographable" sights and sometimes expressed a 'bad' aesthetic, would be seen ever again. Driven by this question, we started taking pictures of travellers using the Intentional Camera Movement (ICM) technique. This method of shooting consists of rotating or moving in a horizontal, vertical or casual direction while photographing. In terms of the visual outcome, ICM images are characterised by a blurry artistic abstraction of the scenery, with marked signs and nuances that depend on a combination of shutter speed, aperture and ISO setting, along with the camera movement and natural light. These characteristics initially seemed to be as a useful means for us to make sense of what we were observing during our daily urban strolls. The intent was to represent metaphorically a sort of "no instants", i.e. the continuing need to shoot denoted by a lack of presence in which people are too distracted to pay attention to their surroundings, yet not entirely focused on the picture they are taking. Nevertheless, as the project moved along, more articulated developments arose. In order to take pictures of tourists, we were retracing their urban paths and, by stopping at the same spots, we were in a way re-enacting their behaviours, the one of the subjects of our visual project. Within this framework and inspired by the pictures we were taking, our curiosity moved to another point: 'Could these ICM images be part of the tourist experience and replace the classical shoots we were questioning? Could ICM provide visual evidence of what Pink and

Massey stated?". Hence, such questions brought us back to Rose's statements in *Using Photographs as Illustrations in Human Geography* (2008), according to whom, scholars should engage with photographs beyond mere documentation or criticism, i.e., photos are not just taken-for-granted illustrations, nor are they problematic representations. Instead, despite their implicit characteristic of being imbued with representation, they have the potential to turn into a creative resource for geographical work, besides conveying something that written text cannot reveal. Moreover, the camera can add new dimensions to the experience and, within an artistic process, it can serve to open up new "worlds" (Gadamer, 1994; Garlick, 2011), thereby helping to make arguments through images.

Influenced by this reasoning, we kept up our urban walk on the most beaten tracks, aware that we were not just thinking of tourists as performers, but that we had turned the performative photographic act inwards through an autoethnographic perspective as a means of engaging with the world. Hence, photography shifted from being a way of mere documentation to an output in "practice-led" research (Hawkins, 2011) to develop a critical-creative style to evoke (rather than illustrate) the experience of being-in and moving-through urban tourist spaces. The experimental aspect of this practice-photography-led research is based on more-than-representational knowledges and draws attention to the corporeal experience, pursuing embodiment in tourism research.

For these reasons, the photographs presented here refer to the second part of the experimental fieldwork. They were taken during the early months of 2017, first in Barcelona where we were working together, then, during the summer in Venice, where I conducted the research alone. At the beginning, Jordi was snapping photos using the ICM mode, while I was capturing the same images in a standard way. This was done to provide us with an archive for comparing photo shoots. Nevertheless, and on my own accord, we later started to take picture likewise, so that the two of us could be involved with the same dynamics and compare personal experiences. Therefore, the outcomes presented below only include the ICM output. This choice also aims to engage the readers with the visual results in a more spontaneous way (if possible),

without any interference from the 'classical shot' on their understanding.

Regarding our fieldwork in Barcelona, for several afternoons, we simply met at some point at *La Rambla* (a tree-lined pedestrian mall that stretches for 1.2 kilometres known, among other things, for its street performers[2]), then wandered around, mingling with the fluctuating flow of tourists on the avenue. Our focus was on the route that links Catalunya Square to the end of La Rambla passing through the Gothic neighbourhood. Here, walking tourists look for the charm of the old neighbourhood in a city that, according to statistics, in 2016 hosted 8 million overnight tourists (this number only covers hotel statistics and does not include illegal flats or alternative accommodations) and, on the whole, saw 30 million visitors that year. In greater detail, the distance we covered goes from Catalunya Square to Columbus Monument passing through La Rambla and making a stop in La Boqueria Market. We then moved to Plaça Reial, Santa Maria del Mar Church and the Gothic Cathedral, then finally returned to Catalunya Square: approximately 3 kilometres.

In Venice, I retraced one of the city's most tourist-beaten tracks, somewhat comparable to the one we traversed in Barcelona. Specifically, it is the path that connects Piazzale Roma, the final destination for the means of transportation that arrive from the mainland, to Saint Mark Square. The easiest way to go from one point to another is to walk across Strada Nova and the Rialto area: 6 kilometres total. This is one of the city's most well-known pedestrian routes, full of shops and restaurants synonymous with a predominantly tourism monoculture. During certain times of the year, this area is so overcrowded that, for the first time in 2017, a project based on geolocation and developed by Corila, A4smart and Bologna University started to investigate the volume of tourists who walk this path. The aim is to provide the local government with numerical data that can be used to shape new tourist-management policies.

On the whole, the selection criteria in both

situations was to go through tourist itineraries as defined by an evident urban structure that works as a *dispositif*, generates visual discourses and promotes gazing practices. The hand-held digital camera was set with a shutter speed of around 1/30 (or shorter), with the aperture as small as possible. Sometimes we stopped when taking shots, but other times, we took pictures while walking or talking, pretending we were tourists on holiday. We photographed a variety of subjects, from broad views, such as architecturally significant buildings (e.g., Plaça Reial in Barcelona), to smaller iconic details (e.g., a gondola in Venice), trying to cover all the elements of interest that normally capture the attention of visitors walking through tourist areas. Hereafter, a selection of photographs is offered (Figures 1-6). Following Rose's suggestions to engage with photography as an autonomous creative resource, and adhering to Cosgrove's statement (2008) on the ability of the images to foresee, as well as see, a specific analysis of the case study's outcomes will come only after displaying the images.

4. A multisensory and mobile technique to enact and question tourist practices

During our fieldwork, tourist paths turned into key settings in which photography as a practice has been explored in its urban choreographies, giving us the opportunity to question how certain tourist practices are structured or, more simply, 'happen'. ICM and the autoethnographic attitude provided us with first-hand experience of what many authors have debated concerning the first edition of Urry's *Tourist Gaze* (Edensor and Holloway, 2008; Lund, 2005; Obrador-Pons, 2007; Scarles, 2009; Spinney, 2015; Urry and Larsen, 2011 among others). These authors, in fact, questioned the predominance of the visual and suggested that places and photography are experienced in multi-sensuous ways.

Focusing on the particular photographic practice of rapidly shooting specific tourist hotspots allowed us to re-examine 'the tourist gaze'. Moreover, such an approach made the corporeality and multimodal experience concrete, and above all, visually explicit.

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[2] Until 2006, street artists were allowed to perform throughout the entire length of La Rambla. Since then, a city council regulation limited this activity only to the final part of the avenue, establishing specific spaces for human statues and music shows.

Figure 1. Walking down La Rambla.
Photo: J. Vic, March 2017.

Figure 2. Taking a break in Plaça Reial.
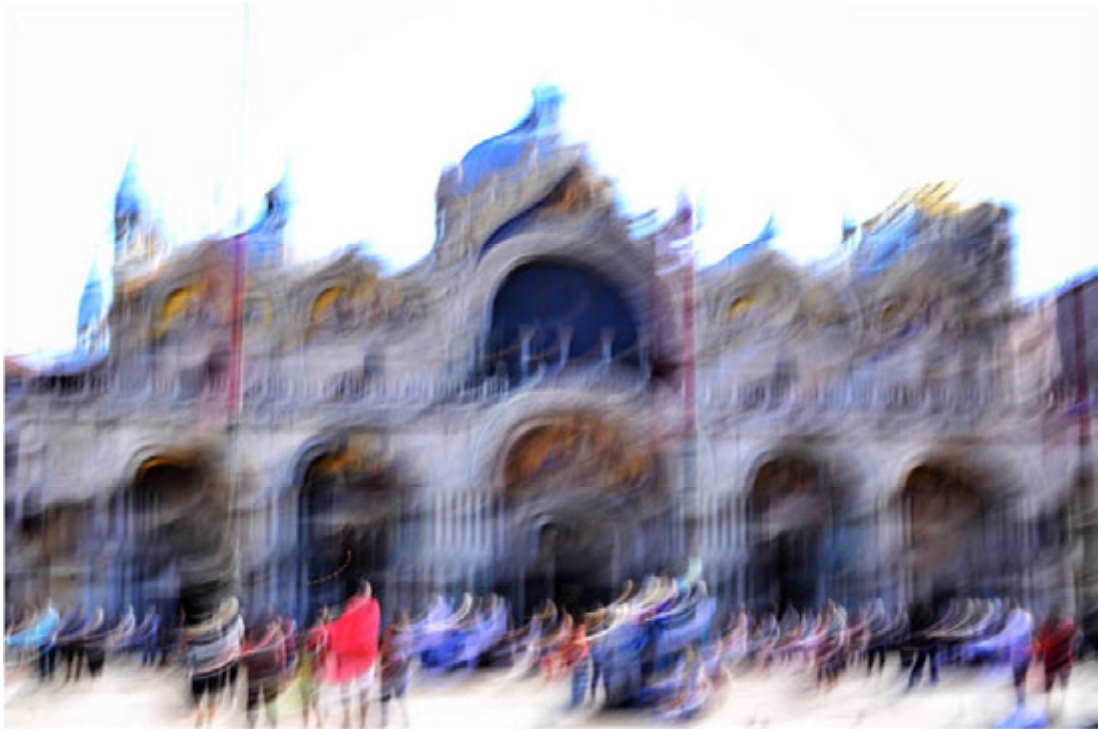Photo: J. Vic, March 2017.

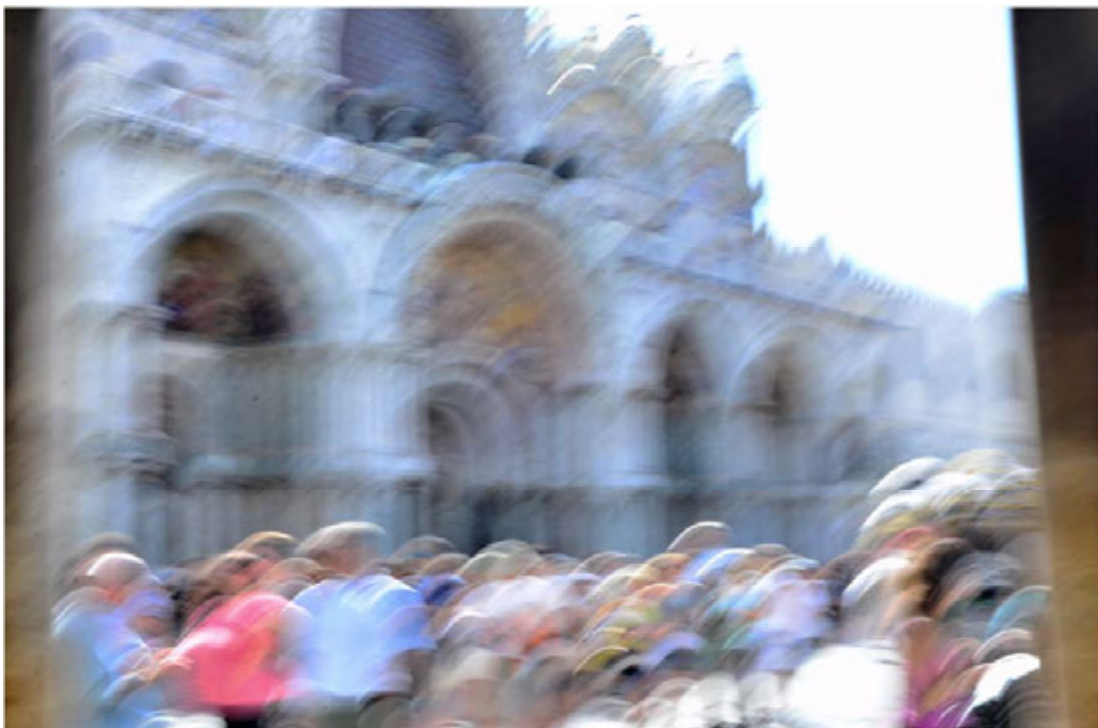Figure 3. Saint Mark's Basilica.
Photo: E. Bruttomesso, August 2017.

Figure 4. People queuing outside Saint Mark's Basilica.
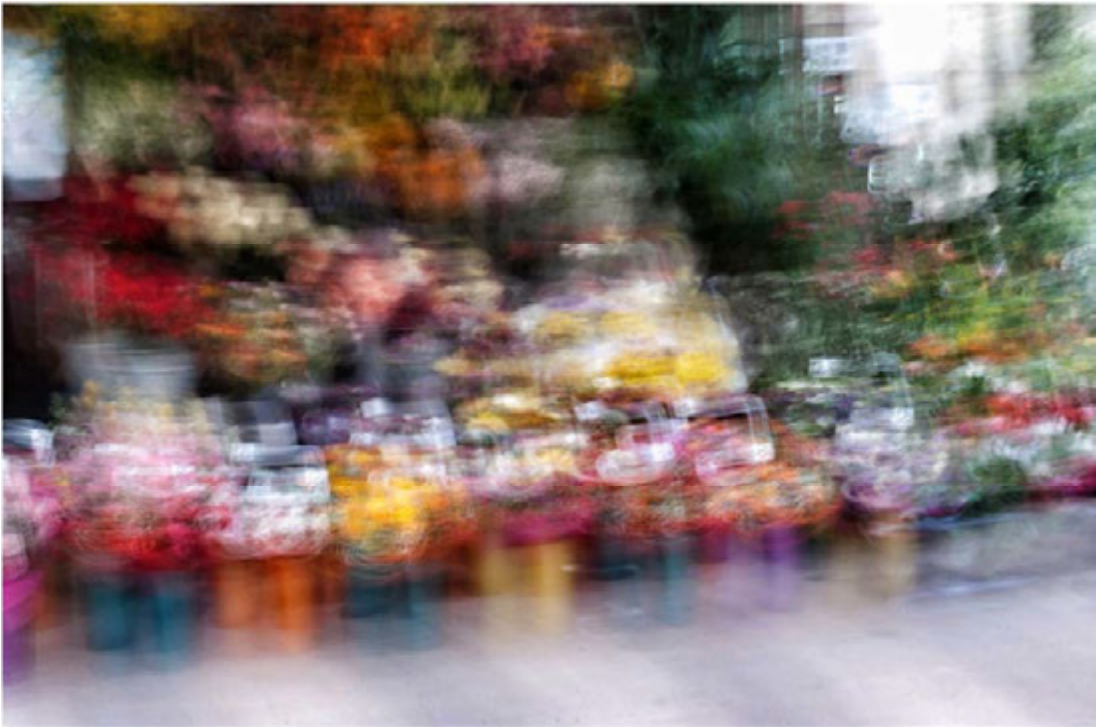Photo: E. Bruttomesso, August 2017.

Figure 5. Flower vendor in La Rambla.
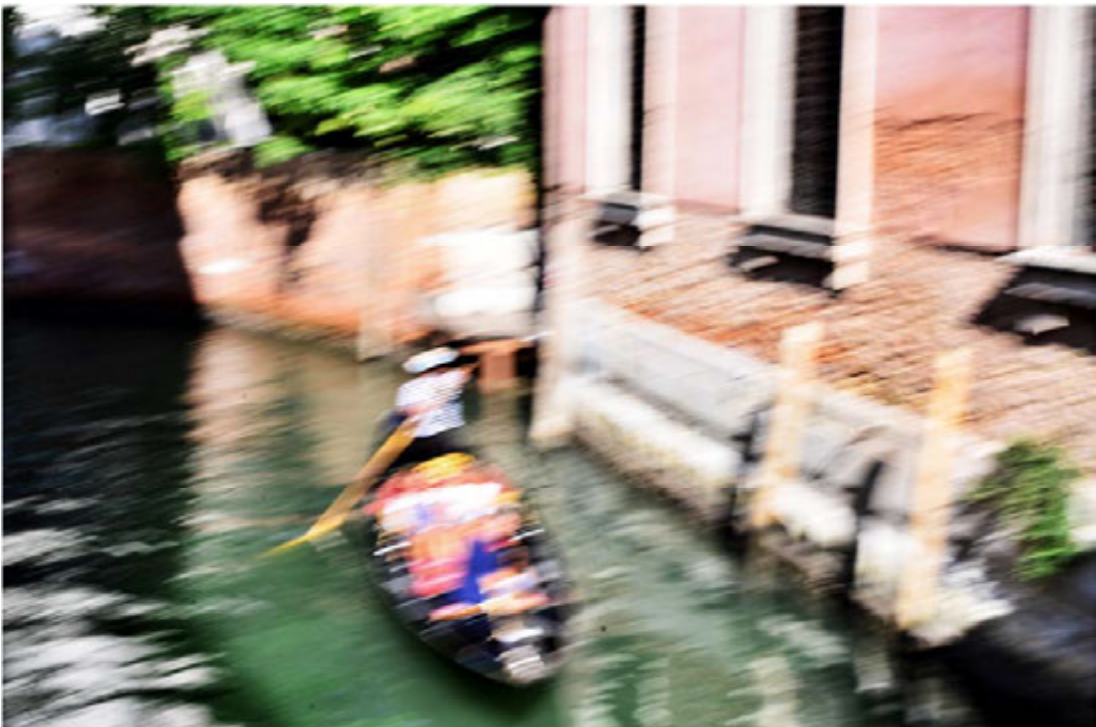Photo: J. Vic, March 2017.

Figure 6. Gondola with tourists in Venice.
Photo: E. Bruttomesso, August 2017.

Indeed, while strolling during our urban visits in Barcelona and Venice, we experienced a multitude of sensations: the noise of cars and buses along La Rambla; music from the shops; people loudly inviting us to enter some restaurant; a wide range of smells, from smog to canals (depending on the city); the kinaesthetic aspects of the urban visit; the exhaustion of walking too much, etc. All these variables somehow 'disturb', blur, shift out of focus and otherwise make visual practice unstable. Our mobile practice-led method made it possible for us to approach the photographic practice by engaging the field directly with our whole bodies. While we were retracing tourists' most beaten tracks, we experienced that the images that normally stand for a waste product are part of a process of extreme dynamism in which 'shooting at a view' is only a fragment of a broader multi-sensuous process. And it is perhaps this kind of picture that tourists delete or do not look at anymore that better represents an experience made of mobility. ICM outcomes, which would seem to be a sort of exaggeration of this kind of picture and still are visual products, seemed to be the product of a specific technique to reveal the world in a way that is not enframing, a somatic sensibility that may be able to interplay with the other senses as it provides the sensation of more longitudinal rhythm. Hence, the present results aim to communicate visually how images continually emerge in relation to a series of flows and rhythms across space in which tourists' bodies move around, consuming photography more and more in movements facilitated by digital media tools.

Subsequently, by understanding photography through a multisensorial theory, and together with the photo-elicitation of our artistic, blurry ICM pictures, we were able to reconsider the cultural role of the sign content of pictures, considering the issue of tourism. Here, again, I am referring to (and questioning) those images that require certain standardisation to be easily recognisable to confirm their status as 'tourist moments'. Many of those secondary, but no less experiential moments are deleted, discarded as part of a 'ritual' that often causes frustration from not achieving the proper frame. ICM aims to explicitly restore those moments lost in flux. Moreover, thanks to the specific outcomes of the technique that we used, the signifier seems to

drift apart from what is signified, legitimising the choice of subjects different from the prototypical hallmark. Indeed, while performing our fieldwork, we often found ourselves picturing unconventional subjects (in relation to the tourist ones), attracted by vivid colours or peculiar details that then were exalted in the ICM photographs. Hence, in our opinion, ICM also works, and differently, as a tactical creative resource that invokes a "non-visual picture" and invites the photo-taker to go off of the beaten track to experiment with new points of view or subjects of interest. This means the visual results can offer a different visual discourse that challenges (and tries to oppose to) the 'normative' visual, i.e., this technique aims for a more intuitive and sensual, less visual, mode of representing the urbanscape as it is encountered by tourists in non-cognitive ways.

In conclusion, broadly speaking, by pulling together photography and ethnography, the intention has been to demonstrate the interdisciplinary potential that links theoretical and also practical, active engagements.

The present study sought to point out how photographs can be active players in making arguments and in carrying out geographical knowledge. That is to say, instead of thinking of photos as mere transparent windows or social constructs, ICM, in this study's context, approaches them as a prism that refracts and puts together cultural practices as well as corporeal experiences in space. Here photography represents both a process and a product, a method out of many that has made it possible to both enact and document the mobile in photographic urban tourism practices.

Moreover, the artistic feature suggests a new potential route to communicating research on critical issues such as mass tourism beyond conventional channels. ICM can be used in urban analysis, as well as perform politics in action. Such research does not aim to provide a complete and rigorous method; rather, it explores practices related to dominant power relations and spatial constraints, such as the concept of cluster city or the beaten track, trying to look differently to such phenomena and offer alternative points of sensorial involvement and contestation to a broader audience beyond academia.

Acknowledgements

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