



Postmodern City films

& Global Flows (2)

**URBANISM AS A WAY OF
LIFE**



Outline: Urbanism as a Way of Life

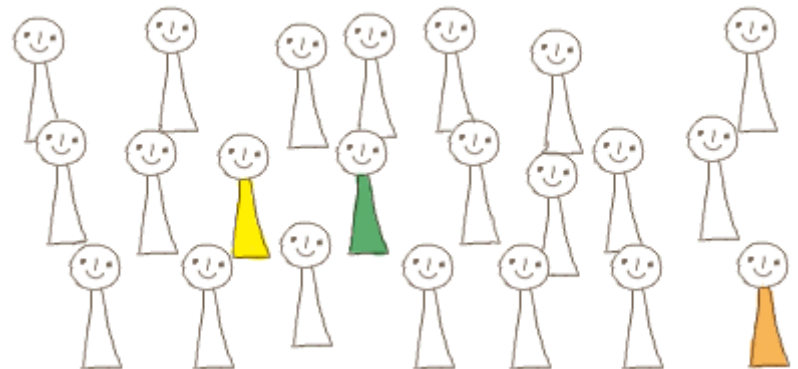
- Key Terms
- General Introduction: Louis Wirth
- Discussion Questions
- Structure
- 1) Population
- 2) Density
- 3) Heterogeneity
- Consequences: Urban Personality
- Critique of Louis Wirth
- Other Perspectives





KEY TERM (1)

- **Anomie:** a breakdown of standards and values or from a lack of purpose or ideals.

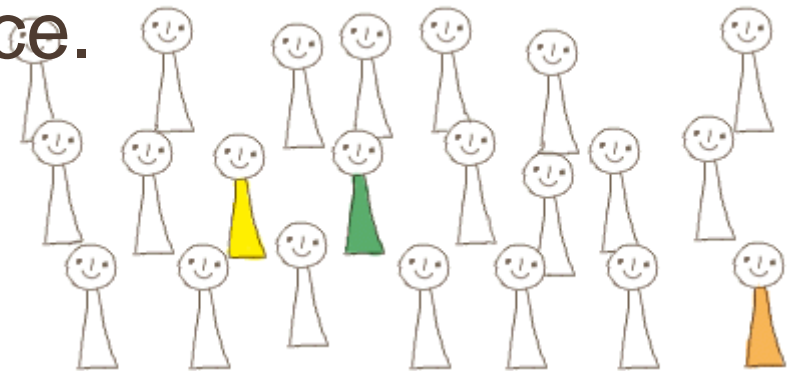


KEY TERM (2) Urbanism

- the physical entity of the city (e.g. population, density)



- A way of life caused by **the density, size and heterogeneity** of the population of a place.






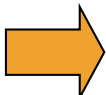
Louis Wirth

- Born in a small village in Germany and then immigrated to the U.S.
- One of the Chicago School.
- His view of urbanism – “the first, and to this day most, comprehensive statement about **the sociological dynamics of modern urban life.**” (source; exemplified in the film *Brazil*.)
- *True?*

August 28, 1897 - May 10, 1952
(source)



1. Urbansim: Questions . . .

- G1 What is urbanism as a way of life for Wirth? How does he analyze it in terms of 1) size of population, 2) density 3) heterogeneity? 
- G2 What are the **three perspectives** he takes to look at urbanism? 
- Do you agree with him? Do you think that city dwellers form 'urban personality'?





Structure

- Definition of the city and urbanism (98)
- Three Aspects:
 1. **Population** (parallel with its functions; segmentalization 99)
 2. **Density** (→ diversity, abrupt transition, loneliness despite the close physical contact)
 3. **Heterogeneity** (mobility, depersonalization)
- Consequences:
 - Urbanism in Ecological perspective (High death rates and low birth rates)
 - As a social formation (**secondary relation**)
 - Collective behavior (voluntary but transitory groups)






1) size of population

- → variations and differences of urban population
- → 1) Lack of bonds of kinship, neighborliness; in terms of secondary roles
 - 2) And segmentalization of human relationships; (99)
- → the 'schizoid' (孤僻) character of urban personality
- Urban 'contacts' – **impersonal, transitory, segmental, and mostly utilitarian** (relations of utility) (quote)
- → the state of **anomie** ("personal feeling of a lack of social norms") **or the social void**
 - → *Do you agree?* Ming-Liang Tsai's, Hsiao-Hsian Hou's, Edward Yang's films & *Enemy*

Disembedded-
ness



1) size of population (quote)

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- (p. 4) "Characteristically, urbanites meet one another in **highly segmental roles**. They are, to be sure, dependent upon more people for the satisfactions of their life-needs than are rural people and thus are associated with a greater number of organized groups, but they are less dependent upon particular persons, and their dependence upon others is confined to a highly fractionalized aspect of the other's round of activity. This is essentially what is meant by saying that the city is characterized by secondary rather than primary contacts. **The contacts of the city may indeed be face to face, but they are nevertheless impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental.** The reserve, the indifference, and the **blasé** outlook which urbanites manifest in their relationships may thus be regarded as devices for **immunizing themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others.** "
 - Indifference as a result of social structure, and as a way of defense.




2) density (p. 99)

- → 1) physical contacts close, but social contacts distant;
 - → We depend on **visual recognition**; develop a sensitivity to a world of artifacts and become progressively farther removed from the world of nature.
- → 2) specialization of areas, their land values vary
 - → tolerant and competitive
 - → reserved and lonely (quote)
- *Do you agree? (What is your experience of walking in a city?)*





2) density (quote p. 100)

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- “Frequent **close physical contact, coupled with great social distance**, accentuates the reserve of unattached individuals toward one another and, unless compensated by other opportunities for response, **gives rise to loneliness**. The necessary frequent movement of great numbers of individuals in a congested habitat causes friction and irritation. Nervous tensions which derive from such personal frustrations are increased by the rapid tempo and the complicated technology under which life in dense areas must be lived.) *Do you agree?*



3) Heterogeneity (p. 100)

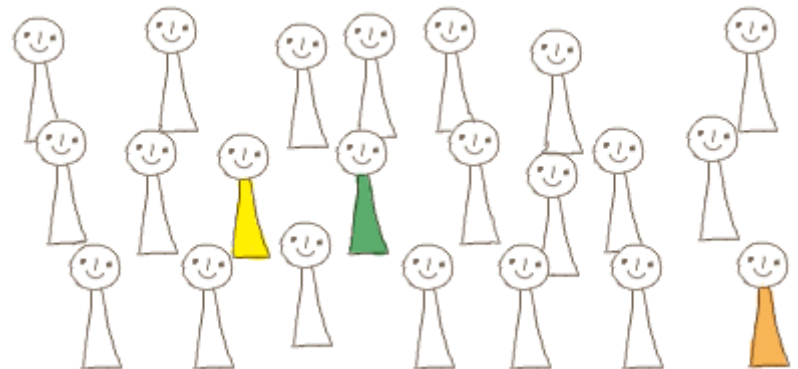
Flaneur?

- **Heightened mobility** → complicates the class structure → sophistication and cosmopolitanism of the urbanite.
- → different interests met by different groups; no undivided allegiance to a single group.
- → the turnover of group membership is rapid. (So is commodity production and everything else → spaces of flows, or non-place).
- → **difficulty in organizing social groups as well as our perception** (cognitive mapping; e.g. two blind people touching an elephant through a video camera.)
- → **segregation and de-personalization** in large congregations, the use of social facilities, or making propaganda (individuals replaced by categories). (quote)



3) Heterogeneity (quote p. 101)

- “Wherever large numbers of differently constituted individuals congregates, the process of depersonalization also enters... Individuality under these circumstances must be replaced by **categories**. ...
- To participate in the social, political, and economic life of the city, “he must subordinate some of his individuality to the demands of the larger community...”
- *Do you agree?*





3) Heterogeneity (p. 193)

→ segregation and de-personalization

Are these the necessary results of social heterogeneity?

→ Carnival (狂歡節) and heteroglossia (眾聲喧譁) can be some other metaphors for social interactions and discourses.



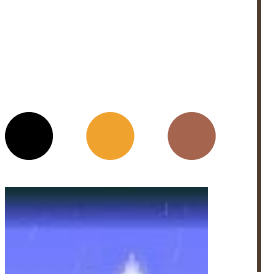
Ref. Methodology:

Urbanism – approached thru' (p. 101)


Three interrelated perspectives:

1. As a physical structure comprising a population base, a technology, and an ecological order; → more in the prime of life; lower birth-rates;
2. As a system of social organization involving a characteristic social structure, a series of social institutions, etc. → secondary contacts
3. As a set of attitudes and ideas, and a constellation of personalities,
4. [urbanism] as a consequence of the interaction between space and spatial practices






Urban Personality -- collective behavior (103)

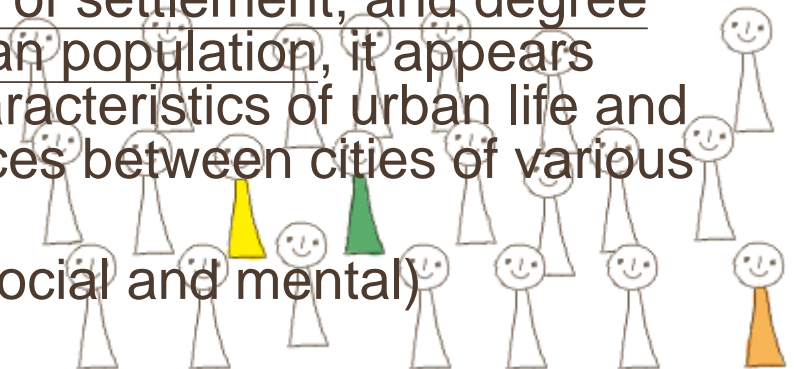
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- Territorial units replaced by **interest units**. (voluntary groups)
 - → society segmented; with a definite center but no clear periphery.
 - → **Lack of communication**: The more people are involved, the lower is the level of communication.
 - Are we definitely mass-ified by the crowd?
 - Social control mainly achieved through group organization and **the use of symbols and stereotypes**.
 - Self-government in economic, cultural ad political realm —impossible or, at best, subject to the unstable equilibrium of pressure groups.
 - **World-wide groups** (large, but simple communication)





Wirth's Definition of Urbanism – Summarized

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1. **Anonymity** → a shift away from primary relationships to secondary relationships. Urbanites interact with others not as individuals but with others in certain roles.
→ Personal relations become **superficial and transitory**.
 2. Urban life is marked by **collectivity, utilitarianism and efficiency**.
 3. **Segmentation** of urban life.
 4. methodology: **A. 3 variables**: “On the basis of the three variables, number, density of settlement, and degree of heterogeneity, of the urban population, it appears possible to explain the characteristics of urban life and to account for the differences between cities of various sizes and types.”
B. 3 structures (physical, social and mental)





Critique of Wirth's Views

- Urbanism as a way of life is not limited to the city. Urban problems are not limited to certain places (such as cities).
- No definite 'urban personality'; kinship can be maintained and made stronger.
- There is a nostalgia or preference for the rural way of life

(Ref. 人文地理學詞典選讀 *The Dictionary of Human Geography* pp. 200-202)

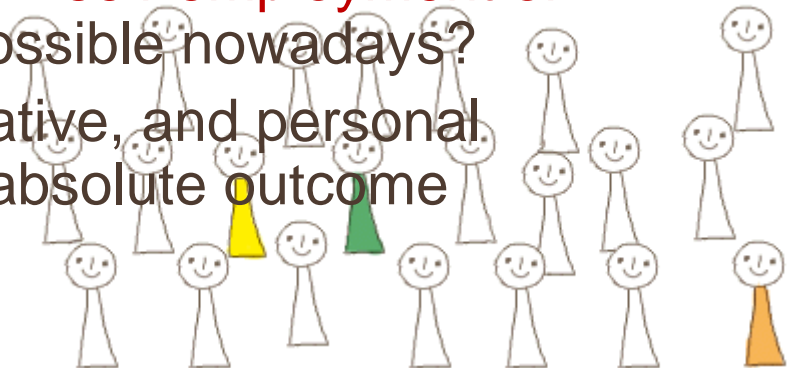




Wirth's Views: Pros and Cons


Pros

- Three major factors of urbanism and their “possible” consequences
 - Population → schizoid or anomie?
 - Density → mosaic of social world
 - Heterogeneity → segregation, transitory groups and depersonalization
- **Modification**
 - (101) Social structure – **self-employment or home-ownership** is possible nowadays?
 - Anonymity is not negative, and personal disintegration not an absolute outcome





Other Possible Views

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- o The other possible interpretations:
 1. Urbanism not limited to cities: Capital is urbanized at the same time it produces urban spaces (e.g. road, factory, school, parks, etc.)
 2. Individuals can still **‘walk’** in their cities to carve out their own spaces.
 3. Urbanism as **unconventional subcultures**— Urbanism stimulates unconventionality. (e.g. 溫河羅, Huashan 1914 Creative Park)

