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The transforming city in nineteenth-century literary journalism: Ramón de Mesonero Romanos' 'Madrid scenes' and Charles Dickens' 'Street sketches'

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ABSTRACT: Nineteenth-century urbanization and industrialization in western Europe have clearly contributed to the formation of societal knowledge and self-reflexive cultural iconographies. Especially from the 1820s onwards, one major context for discussing the social and cultural diversity of the city and concomitant socio-political tensions was the emerging market of journals and magazines. Based upon the writings of two exemplary authors, this article investigates with which techniques and metaphors nineteenth-century journalistic sketches depicted urban sociability and conditions. Furthermore, it reflects on how not only the ever more differentiating urban environments but also the proximity of different networks and institutions of knowledge encouraged the refinement of social observation and thought. Exploring a neglected genre of social knowledge production, the article proposes new perspectives for urban history and aims at stimulating a critical review of contemporary research practices in all branches of the social sciences.

Introduction

The increasing density and heterogeneity of the nineteenth-century city stimulated a desire for understanding the dynamics of European urban centres. Far-reaching social and cultural transformations, caused by industrialization, rural–urban migration and the fragmentation of social groups, were discussed in the meetings of scholarly associations, philanthropic societies and political assemblies as well as in cafés and theatre lobbies. Furthermore, the growing market for periodicals constituted an important forum for social reflection. An explosion of journalistic activity from the 1830s onwards[1] encouraged editors,

[1] New technologies of print and diffusion, the consolidation of large reading groups, the increasing liberalization of censorship and novel advertisement strategies prepared the ground for a large-scale production of periodicals in many European cities:

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writers and illustrators to devise new formats for recording sociocultural phenomena, such as the caricature, the report on urban reforms and festivities and the notification of social events. In this context, the serial and documentary sketch, which inspects the transforming metropolis through descriptions of social types and behaviours, paradigmatic places and developing institutions, evolved as a laboratory of urban study. Already in 1798, the editor Friedrich Justin Bertuch stated that the periodical had replaced the monograph as the primary form through which to comprehend urban life: 'this fermenting and roaring, exploding and charring, flocculating and sublimating of the most heterogeneous substances in these enormous vessels [the cities]' could no longer be grasped

> by a static description…I can, indeed, say: today it is like this. But often, in a few weeks, actors, scenery, and spectators are renewed, and the old play is newly enacted in new scenarios in front of new spectators. The person who writes a book about this just sets up gravestones. A regularly recurring periodical, however, rejuvenates with the rejuvenating…and delivers ever fresh paintings.[2]

Bertuch's serial *London und Paris* (1798–1815) aimed to present recent developments in both metropolises to a German-speaking public and figured among the first periodicals to establish the format of the documentary social sketch. Other triggers of this editorial genre were the journal *The Spectator* (1711–12), Louis-Sébastien Mercier's *Tableau de Paris*[3] (1881–88) and the *Gazette de France*, which hosted Étienne de Jouy's series, 'Observations sur les moeurs et les usages parisiens au commencement du XIXe siècle', from 1811 to 1814. These and other examples of documentary prose served as models for journalistic descriptions of the accelerating pace of urban life, which became a fashionable, and lucrative, print product in the first half of the century.[4] Different periodical formats (from daily or weekly newspapers to literary and political magazines) established their own sections of social sketches, which often included detailed illustrations.[5] The journalistic sketch production clearly

J. Boening, 'The unending conversation. The role of periodicals in England and on the continent during the Romantic age', in S.P. Sondrup and V. Nemoianu (eds.), *Nonfictional Romantic Prose. Expanding Borders* (Amsterdam, 2004), 285–301. The term 'journalism' was supposedly first introduced in the 1830s in France and quickly translated into other European languages: A. King and J. Plunkett (eds.), *Victorian Print Media. A Reader* (Oxford, 2005), 293.

[2] F.J. Bertuch, 'Plan und Ankündigung', *London und Paris*, 1 (1798), 3–11, at 6, 6f; all German and Spanish texts have been translated by the author.

[3] The *Tableau de Paris* originally appeared in instalments in the *Journal des Dames* (1775–76) before it was published as a multivolume book (1781–88).

[4] On the emergence of a transnational (mostly western) European tradition of urban self-inspection in the first half of the nineteenth century, see D. García Cuvardic, *El flañeur en las prácticas culturales, el costumbrismo y el modernismo* (Paris, 2012).

[5] This was especially the case from the 1840s onwards. See D. Cuvardic García, 'Programa de ilustraciones y plan iconográfico de las colecciones costumbristas de tipos sociales en los españoles, los cubanos y los mexicanos…pintados por sí mismos', *Kánina, Revista*

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was a transnational phenomenon. Writers, editors and draughtsmen collaborated in dense networks all over Europe. Individual sketches and entire series were quickly translated (especially from French into other European languages) and their themes adapted and reorganized according to local requirements.[6]

It was in this vibrant publishing context that Charles Dickens (1812–70) successfully launched his 'Street sketches' in various London newspapers and magazines between 1833 and 1835.[7] At the same time, Ramón de Mesonero Romanos (1803–82) started writing his 'Escenas matritenses' ('Madrid scenes') for different periodicals of the Spanish capital.[8] In their sketches, Dickens and Mesonero Romanos introduced themselves as curious city strollers who took notes of whatever they encountered on their way and assured their readership of delivering first-hand observations of behaviours and speaking habits, ways of getting around, dressing, eating, celebrating and housing of all urban social classes. Mesonero Romanos' and Dickens' sketches were widely read and were later edited and, subsequently, re-edited in collected volumes.[9]

Despite their documentary and sociological value, the testimonials of Dickens, Mesonero Romanos and their fellow journalists have neither attracted much interest in the field of urban history, nor in the history of the social sciences; even in literary scholarship, these periodical texts are a largely neglected genre.[10] This article assesses documentary journalism as a form of social knowledge production and thereby aims at putting this

de Artes y Letras, 38 (2014), 241–62. For a bibliographic overview of sketches written in English-, German- and French-speaking contexts, see M. Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century: European Journalism and its 'Physiologies', 1830–1850* (Basingstoke, 2007), 329–34.

[6] A. Peñas Ruiz, 'Aproximación a la literatura panorámica española (1830–1850)', *Interférences littéraires/Literaire interferenties*, 8 (2012), 77–108.

[7] Dickens published a variety of essays on the metropolis and its inhabitants in the *Monthly Magazine*, the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Evening Chronicle* and *Bell's Life of London*, before they appeared in two illustrated volumes, *Sketches by Boz*, vols. I and II (1836).

[8] *Cartas Españolas* (1832), *La Revista Española* (1832–33) and *Diario de Madrid* (1835); see M. de los Angeles Alaya, 'El Madrid urbano en las "Escenas matritenses" de Mesonero Romanos', in M. Criado del Val (ed.), *Caminería hispánica: actas del II Congreso Internacional de Caminería Hispánica* (Guadalajara, 1996), 317–28.

[9] After John Macrone had published Dickens' 'Street sketches' in the collection *Sketches by Boz* in 1836, in the same year the collection was re-edited, and a second volume was published with further articles. In 1839, the sketches appeared as a single volume edited by Chapman and Hall (London) and Baudry's European Library (Paris). The first 'cheap' edition was published by Chapman and Hall in 1850. Mesonero Romanos' urban sketches were first collected in three volumes between 1835 and 1838 under the title *Panorama matritense: cuadros de costumbres de la capital, observados y descritos, por un curioso parlante* by Imprenta de Repullés in Madrid. The collection was newly edited in 1862 (Establecimiento Tipográfico de D. Francisco de Paula Mellado) and 1881 (Oficinas de la Ilustración Española y Americana). Further articles appeared in four volumes under the title *Escenas matritenses* in 1842. The *Escenas matritenses* were re-edited in 1845, 1851, 1879 and 1881; see G. Hervás Fernández, *La sociedad española en su literatura*, vol. I (Madrid, 2010), 133.

[10] With regard to western European and American periodical literature, only the French 'tableaux des moeurs' and 'physiologies' and the Hispanic 'artículo de costumbres' have received significant attention. See N. Preiss and V. Stiénon (eds.), *Interférences*

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rich corpus of pre-disciplinary sociographic[11] literature up for discussion. First, it reflects on the rise of sociographic journalism as embedded in dense, heterogeneous urban enviromments. In addition to classic works of urban study, it draws upon writings by Mesonero Romanos and Dickens in order to illustrate how the city itself furnished the *motifs* for the strolling journalist, as well as provided the social, intellectual and material *infrastructures* to promote the refinement of sociocultural inquiry. Secondly, by taking the example of selected texts written by Mesonero Romanos and Dickens, the article explores characteristic patterns of representation and argumentation in nineteenth-century sociographic journalism. In particular, it looks at the literary technique of representing urban public spaces to explore urban density and diversity, and it discusses how the journalists used the widely entertaining journalistic sketch to shape public opinion on urban reforms and social issues. This part also exposes differences between Dickens' and Mesonero Romanos' approaches to urban life. While Mesonero Romanos appreciated the progressive improvement of urban infrastructures and was largely concerned with the behaviours and values of the urban middle classes, Dickens, although embracing the opportunities of the big city, took an active interest in social issues. Both of these perspectives on the city were widely established in contemporary journalism as well as in other domains of social knowledge production.[12] The article concludes with the suggestion of viewing early journalism as a frame of societal knowledge, and argues for its possibilities for providing new historical and methodological perspectives to urban study and social research.

Urbanization processes and social knowledge production

Perceptions of 'urbanity'

The sociologist Louis Wirth published his influential article, 'Urbanism as a way of life', in 1938.[13] In his attempt to distinguish the city from other forms of settlement, Wirth specified it 'as a relatively large, dense, and permanent settlement of socially heterogeneous individuals'.[14]

littéraires/Literaire interferenties, 8 (2012), 77–108; J.F. Montesinos, *Costumbrismo y novela Ensayo sobre el redescubrimiento de la realidad Española* (Madrid, 1960).

[11] Since the term 'ethnographic' is widely associated with the description of distant cultures and ethnic groups, I prefer the term sociographic/sociography to refer to the descriptive examination of sociocultural phenomena and subcultures in one's own society. On the uses of the term sociography as descriptive sociology, see L. Brunt, 'Into the community', in P. Atkinson *et al.* (eds.), *Handbook of Ethnography* (London, 2002), 80–91.

[12] On prevalent views of the city in the broader context of nineteenth-century literature and political and scientific discourse, see A. Lees, *Cities Perceived. Urban Society in European and American Thought, 1820–1940* (Manchester, 1985).

[13] L. Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1938), 1–24.

[14] *Ibid.*, 8. This definition, which focuses on differentiating urban agglomerations from rural settlements, still serves as an important reference point in urban study. For example, D. Stevenson, *The City* (Cambridge and Malden, 2013), 8ff.

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According to Wirth and his contemporaries at the Chicago School of urban sociology, the rapid growth and densification of the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century city had favoured the development of cultural adaption techniques.[15] For instance, since people found themselves in constantly changing relationships with strangers, the observation and classification of visual characteristics, such as clothes, posture or facial features, became vitally important in order to interpret the behaviours of individuals and groups and to adapt one's own role to social requirements. In this regard, Wirth wrote, '[t]he urban world puts a premium role on visual recognition. We see the uniform, which denotes the role of the functionaries and are oblivious to the personal eccentricities that are hidden behind the uniform. We tend to acquire and develop a sensitivity to a world of artefacts and become progressively farther removed from the world of nature.'[16]

Comparable ideas on population density, the importance of exterior appearances and the emergence of social role concepts had been developed in the context of urban sociographic journalism more than a century earlier.[17] Despite the fact that individual cities differed considerably in size and population, most European urban populations experienced significant growth from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards.[18] As with other journalistic observers across Europe,[19] Mesonero Romanos and Dickens constructed 'the city' of their time as a novel and fascinating type of socio-spatial configuration that challenged the individual's orientation. Certainly, they did not employ the same terminology as Wirth and his colleagues, but instead derived interpretative metaphors from the intellectual fields of anatomy and medicine[20] and the literary-artistic tradition of understanding the world as a stage.[21] Furthermore, as many

[15] L.R. Burns, 'The Chicago School and the study of organization–environment relations', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 16 (1980), 342–58.

[16] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', 14.

[17] Such perspectives were also discussed in contemporary literary, philanthropic and political discourse: Lees, *Cities Perceived*.

[18] T. Hall, *Planning Europe's Capital Cities: Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Urban Developments* (London and New York, 1997). Although the absolute population numbers of London and Madrid differed significantly, Mesonero Romanos' Madrid was a 'big city' in terms of population size, density and everyday culture. The mid-century city, which in 1834 numbered approximately 175,000 inhabitants (and already 300,000 in 1860), largely remained within its walls and thus produced 'the sensation of stress and chaos, of a confusion of classes': S. Julía, S. Julía Díaz, D.R. Ringrose and C. Segura, *Madrid. Historia de una capital* (Madrid, 2000), 355; see also Instituto Geográfico Nacional (n.d.), 'Densidad de población en Madrid a mediados del siglo XIX, antes del derribo de la cerca', www.ign.es/espmap/figuras_espacios_bach/pdf/Ciudad%20Fig_08.pdf, accessed 6 Nov. 2017.

[19] Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century*, 211–49.

[20] M. Lauster, 'Physiognomy, zoology, and physiology as paradigms in sociological sketches of the 1830s and 40s', in M. Percival and G. Tytler (eds.), *Physiognomy in Profile. Lavater's Impact on European Culture* (Newark, DE, 2005), 161–79. Graeme Davison has shown how the idea of the city as a natural system became the dominant paradigm of urban investigation in the early nineteenth century: G. Davison, 'The city as a natural system: theories of urban society in early nineteenth-century Britain', in D. Fraser and A. Sutcliffe (eds.), *The Pursuit of Urban History* (London, 1983), 349–70.

[21] B. Quiring, *Revisions of the Theatrum Mundi Metaphor in Early Modern England* (Berlin, 2014).

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nineteenth-century urban journalists, they referred to the novel visual devices of their time.[22] In his article 'Madrid a la luna' ('Madrid under the moon', 1837), for instance, Mesonero Romanos alludes to the semantic fields of visual culture and the historical tradition of the theatre when characterizing the city of Madrid as a 'lively vision' ('animada óptica') and a 'moral panorama' ('panorama moral').[23] Each day, Madrid offers 'new pages to read, new and peculiar scenes to observe'.[24] It is an 'animated theatre', where social roles and identities became a matter of performance and 'each actor has rehearsed his [or her] role to present it to the public'.[25] In a later text, Mesonero Romanos distinguishes the various urban sub-stages that replaced the 'assembly rooms of the brotherhoods' and the 'modest salon of some ex-minister'[26] as primary locations for the display of distinctive attributes: '[t]he uncountable columns of the periodicals, the parliamentary tribune, the political and aristocratic salons, the scientific and literary gatherings, the tables in the cafés, the theatre-stages, the chairs on the Prado[27]…all these and many other [places] constitute more of these relentless, public factories of reputation'.[28]

Although they differed in their political and ideological orientation, both Dickens and Mesonero Romanos critically reflected on the ambiguities of contemporary urban life, its density and hectic pace, its anonymity, the development of ever more elaborate social roles and the concomitants of vanity and emotional indifference. On the one hand, anticipating the thoughts of Georg Simmel's influential chapter, 'The metropolis and mental life',[29] Mesonero Romanos appreciated the population density of the city, which enabled everybody to live 'in his or her way, without fearing censorship and the drawbacks of a small village'.[30] On the other hand, when anonymity prevails and purposive role scripts determine all human interaction, '[t]he relationships are superficial, as they are supposed to be in a populous town, where you neither know whom you talk to, nor who is

[22] For example, 'panorama' or 'diorama' were recurring metaphors used to grasp the city in both its entirety and its compartmentalized units. On the relationships between visual culture and social thought, see R. Brosch, 'Victorian challenges to ways of seeing. Everyday life, entertainment, images, and illusions', in R. Brosch (ed.), *Victorian Visual Culture* (Heidelberg, 2008), 21–63; J. Wechsler, *A Human Comedy. Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (London, 1982).

[23] R. de Mesonero Romanos, 'Madrid a la luna' (1837), in R. de Mesonero Romanos, *Escenas matritenses. Colección de artículos de costumbres* (Valparaíso, 1846), 336–45, at 336.

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] R. de Mesonero Romanos, 'Industria de la capital' (1852), in R. de Mesonero Romanos, *Tipos, grupos y bocetos de cuadros de costumbres dibujados a la pluma* (Madrid, 1862), 37–46, at 40.

[27] Until today, the Paseo del Prado is one of the most important boulevards in Madrid.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] See G. Simmel, 'The metropolis and mental life' (1903), in K.H. Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York, 1950), 409–24.

[30] R. de Mesonero Romanos, *Manual histórico-topográfico, administrativo y artístico de Madrid* (Madrid, 1844), 113.

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your neighbour'.[31] In a socio-spatial configuration, where 'public society has eradicated private society',[32] true friendship and lasting affection 'naturally have to cede ground to artificial calculation, sordid selfishness and fastidious vanity'.[33] In a similar way, and only some years earlier, Charles Dickens' sketch 'Thoughts about people' (1836) discussed how the state of anonymity affected many immigrants who left their homes and families to find work in the capital: '['T]is strange with how little notice, good, bad or indifferent, a man may live and die in London.'[34] 'There is a numerous class of people in this great metropolis who seem not to possess a single friend, and whom nobody appears to care for.'[35] One epitome of anonymity and the dynamics of visual distinction was the desperate ambition to maintain one's appearance in front of an urban public. In his article 'Shabby-genteel people',[36] Dickens described an exemplary man who regularly frequented the reading room of the British museum. Each single day he took a seat at the same place and positioned himself 'as close to the table as possible, in order to conceal the lack of buttons on his coat'.[37] One day the man stayed away for a whole week, and when he came back his clothes seemed to have been entirely renewed. However, the man's newly acquired dignity prevailed only for a short period of time: 'It is a deceitful liquid that black and blue reviver', the narrator remarks, 'we have watched its effects on many a shabby-genteel man. It betrays its victims into a temporary assumption of importance.'[38] What made this type of the 'shabby-genteel man' (Dickens claimed to have never seen female examples of this kind) particularly pitiable was his awareness of his own misery and his tireless ambition to attain a higher social standing: '[H]e feels his poverty and vainly strives to conceal it.'[39]

Urban networks of knowledge production

The increasing density of urban agglomerations and the rise of bourgeois milieus in early nineteenth-century Europe favoured the growth of editorial enterprises from the 1830s onwards, as well as the foundation of political, literary, philanthropic, economic and scientific associations. Cities, in this regard, represented 'matrices of places of knowledge', in which various networks, media and knowledge forms interacted and debated issues such as public health and urban planning, before

[31] *Ibid.*, 112.
[32] R. Mesonero Romanos, 'Inconvenientes de Madrid' (1841), in R. de Mesonero Romanos, *Escenas matritenses*, 4th edn (Madrid, 1845), 509–16, at 512.
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] C. Dickens, 'Thoughts about people' (1836), in C. Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (Paris, 1839), 168–72, at 168.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] C. Dickens, 'Shabby-genteel people', in Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, 206–9.
[37] *Ibid.*, 207.
[38] *Ibid.*, 208.
[39] *Ibid.*, 209.

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being transformed into professionalizing discourses.[40] Urban journalists were active agents within these diverse knowledge regimes[41] and made recourse to their data and debates. Mesonero Romanos, for instance, produced and divulged social knowledge not only within the context of literary journalism, but contributed to civic life as a politician and urban architect.[42] Among many other public institutions and formal or informal associations, which were proliferating in the city,[43] he attended the artistic-literary salon El Parnasillo and co-founded the scholarly association Ateneo Científico y Literario de Madrid (1835). The reforms that Madrid had experienced in the first decades of the nineteenth century[44] inspired Mesonero Romanos to inspect the ways in which similar transformations had been processed in other European cities, and he discussed parts of his comparative observations in his work *Memories of a Journey through France and Belgium in 1840 and 1841* (*Recuerdos de viaje por Francia y Bélgica en 1840 y 1841*). While working for the city council between 1845 and 1850, Mesonero Romanos proposed a new urban reform programme (*Proyecto de mejoras generales*, 1846)[45] and was involved in the elaboration of new municipal regulations in 1848.[46] The variety of political networks and scholarly societies within which Mesonero Romanos operated, and the fact that he constantly processed his thoughts in different knowledge formats

[40] S. Dierig *et al.*, 'Introduction: toward an urban history of science', *Osiris*, 18 (2003), 1–19, at 15. We certainly cannot put the boom of knowledge production in cities like London or Paris on the same level with developments in Madrid. However, despite the slow development of a bourgeois civic structure, after the end of the absolutist rule of Ferdinand VII in 1833 the Spanish capital clearly experienced the consolidation of a more active public sphere as well as major debates with regard to urban reforms. See E. Otero Carvajal and R. Pallol Trigueros, 'El Madrid moderno, capital de una España urbana en transformación, 1860–1931', *Historia Contemporanea*, 39 (2011), 541–88, at 544; see also T. Lewis, 'Structures and agents: the concept of "bourgeois revolution" in Spain', *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies*, 3 (1999), 7–16. Moreover, the Spanish capital experienced a significant rise of periodical publications: J.C. Pereira Castañares and F. García Sanz, 'Prensa y opinion pública madrileña en la primera mitad del siglo XIX', in L.E. Otero Carvajal and A. Bahamonde (eds.), *Madrid en la sociedad del siglo XIX*, vol. I (Madrid, 1986), 220–1.

[41] Johan Heilbron has proposed the concept of 'regime' to describe pre-disciplinary frameworks of scholarly reflection: J. Heilbron, *The Rise of Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1995), 13.

[42] U. Laumeyer, *Costumbrismo und Stadtentwicklung. Mesonero Romanos und Madrid* (Frankfurt am Main 1986).

[43] On the expansion of institutions such as cafés, museums, theatres and semi-public scientific, literary or political salons (*tertulias*) as promoters of public discourse, see Laumeyer, *Costumbrismo und Stadtentwicklung*; I. Morus *et al.*, 'Scientific London', in C. Fox (ed.), *London: World City 1800–1840* (London, 1992), 129–42; A. Gelz, *Tertulia: Literatur und Soziabilität im Spanien des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 2006), 343–4.

[44] P. Navascués Palacio, 'Introducción al desarrollo urbano de Madrid hasta 1830', in *Testimonios de su historia hasta 1875* (Madrid, 1979).

[45] Laumeyer, *Costumbrismo und Stadtentwicklung*, 229ff.

[46] J. Fernández-Lasquetty y Blanc, 'Mesonero Romanos y la formación de las ordenanzas municipales de Madrid de 1847', in M.D. Gutiérrez Calvo and R. Pérez-Bustamante (eds.), *Estudios de historia del derecho europeo: homenaje al P. G. Martínez Díez*, vol. III (Madrid, 1994), 341–58.

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(travel accounts, political reports, chronicles, city manuals, statutory regulations), enriched his journalistic work significantly.

Charles Dickens was also involved in the ramified knowledge networks of the growing metropolis.[47] In contrast to Mesonero Romanos, who looked optimistically to the future of Madrid and participated in the city's planning projects, Dickens voiced rather critical views on urban developments and distanced himself from formal politics. Dickens had grown up in poor conditions and dedicated a large part of his publishing efforts to social issues in order to draw attention to the situation of the underprivileged parts of the population.[48] He was connected to a diverse set of philanthropic institutions and, through various channels, addressed problems including alcoholism, public health and financial deprivation.[49] Dickens set up a home for working-class women in London's district of Shepherds Bush in 1847, which he managed for 10 years.[50] Throughout his life, Dickens held numerous speeches on public and fundraising events organized by institutions like the Royal Academy to the Railway Benevolent Society or the Great Ormond Street Hospital and advocated workers' rights, the improvement of education, public health reforms and other political measurements to alleviate poverty.[51]

In short, urban sketches by Dickens and Mesonero Romanos were published in the context of dense urban knowledge structures. Beyond their journalistic work, and according to their personal interests and backgrounds, they were both engaged in a variety of local institutions and associations, and, in their journalistic oeuvre, referred to the topics, debates, data and formats of representation which circulated within these. Through magazines and journals, Mesonero Romanos and Dickens resumed contemporary societal debates and popularized them within the city and beyond.

The urban social sketch: perspectives, arrangements and representational techniques

The consolidation of the periodical sketch as a genre of social observation stimulated specific views on the city and particular forms of representation. As the editor Bertuch put it in 1798, periodical publications required constantly new approaches and outlooks on urban life. '[The periodical] flies with the flying genius of the time and delivers ever-fresh paintings, as it is fresh itself.'[52] Moreover, the brevity of the periodical text urged the author to break the city's multifacetedness down to discrete descriptions of

[47] M. Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven, 2009); N. Pope, *Dickens and Charity* (New York, 1978).
[48] F. Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City* (London, 1979), 115–42.
[49] Pope, *Dickens and Charity*.
[50] Slater, *Charles Dickens*, 208.
[51] K.J. Fielding (ed.), *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010).
[52] Bertuch, 'Plan und Ankündigung', 7.

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scenes, institutions, places and types. Heinz Brüggemann has investigated literary perceptions of the city in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe and has pointed to the techniques of 'isolation' and 'framing' of individual elements as major devices to grasp 'the moving, the diffuse, the manifold…in a situation, a constellation of characters, or a significant unit'.[53] These techniques were especially decisive in the periodical urban sketch, upon which a single aspect of urban life was focused.

Which aspects and elements of the city did the journalistic observers deal with? 'The metropolitan sketch of the 1830s and 1840s', as Martina Lauster writes, 'lies at the heart of a major review of middle-class civilisation on the brink of modernity.'[54] This review involved the aspiration of, first, grasping the transformations of the time as they were experienced in urban settings, and, secondly, of documenting the status quo of established sociocultural customs and routines. Accordingly, like other contemporary European sketches, Mesonero Romanos' and Dickens' sociographic texts deal with recurring motifs: the rise of new and the disappearance of traditional social types and customs,[55] fashionable institutions like the café and the theatre,[56] leisure activities,[57] the effects of novel forms of social differentiation and distinction,[58] paradigmatic districts or places of the city and urban reforms.[59] In most cases, these topics are approached through typifying descriptions that are combined with historical contextualization, cross-cultural consideration or political comment.

This technique of constructing sociocultural units, and then contextualizing and commenting on them, corresponds with the main features of ethnographic writing still valid today.[60] The sketch journalist, much like the ethnographer, starts from the assumption that a cultural configuration may be specified through '[t]he analysis of spatially and temporally bounded situations or events'.[61] Accordingly, sketch writers and ethnographers choose meaningful units, such as situations, personal relationships,

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] Lauster, *Sketches of the Nineteenth Century*, 3.

[55] See, for instance, Mesonero Romanos' and Dickens' articles 'The last cab-driver, and the first omnibus cad' (1836), 'Hackney-coach stands' (1836), 'The first of May' (1836), 'Antes, ahora y después' ('Before, now, and after', 1837), 'El cesante' ('The unemployed civil servant', 1837).

[56] 'Los cómicos en cuaresma' ('The comedians during lent', 1832), 'Private theatres' (1836), 'Astleys' (1836), 'El teatro por fuera' ('The theatre from the outside', 1838).

[57] 'La romería de San Isidro' ('The pilgrimage of San Isidro', 1832), 'La filarmonía' ('The philharmony', 1833), 'The steam excursion' (1834), 'The ladies' societies' (1835).

[58] 'Meditations in Monmouth-street' (1836), 'The pawnbroker's shop' (1836), 'El alquiler de un cuarto' ('Renting a room', 1837).

[59] 'Policía urbana' ('Urban policy', 1833), 'Seven Dials' (1836), 'Paseo por las calles' ('A stroll through the streets', 1835).

[60] M.D. LeComte and J.J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research. An Introduction* (Lanham, 2010), 195–225; J. van Maanen, *Tales of the Field. On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago and London, 1988).

[61] G.A. Marcus and D. Cushman, 'Ethnographies as texts', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 11 (1982), 25–69, at 33.

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behavioural scripts and material structures, to approach and discuss abstract ideas about culture and society through tangible descriptions.[62] As the selection of these ethnographic fragments, their arrangement is an arbitrary enterprise as well. Similar to professional ethnographers, sketch writers only incorporate those descriptions, anecdotes, scenes and quotes in their texts that serve their specific objectives and lines of argument.[63]

To analyse some of the different strategies of approaching the urban complex used by sketch writers, I will now introduce a sample of texts taken from the series 'Escenas matritenses' and 'Street sketches'. These texts illustrate two distinct procedures, both of which were widespread in journalistic sketch writing. The first group of sketches deals with observations of selected spaces of the city and evokes the experience of urban heterogeneity and rush, whereas the second group displays particular scenes and/or plots in order to reflect on issues related to urbanization processes and societal transformations in general.

Public spaces as urban microcosms

Public spaces represent microcosms of a city's sociocultural diversity and contradictions. Furthermore, to approach a city through its streets, squares and public gardens enables one to take into account multiple dimensions, such as material settings, social types, images, values, identities, sounds, interactions and dialogues, all of which tell the observer about contemporary conditions of urban life and society. For this reason, highly frequented urban locations are a primary matter also in today's urban research. Doreen Massey's geography of space, for instance, envisions a place's relationships with other places in the world by emphasizing how supralocal conflicts materialize in concrete streets, squares, districts, shopping malls or border regions.[64] Another example is Kathrin Wildner's investigation of the relationships between material environments, discursive constructions of historical identity and social interactions in order to explore the diverse processes of perception and appropriation of the city.[65] In her study of the Zócalo (the main square in central Mexico City), Wildner conceives of this space not as an isolated ethnographic unit, but as a symbolic element of the entire city,

[62] Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field*, 49.
[63] V. Crapanzano, 'Ermes' dilemma: the masking of subversion in ethnographic description', in J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, 1986), 51–76.
[64] D. Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis, 1994).
[65] K. Wildner, '"Istanbul modern": urban images, planning processes and the production of space in Istanbul's port area', in W. Kokot *et al*. (eds.), *Port Cities as Areas of Transition: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Bielefeld, 2008), 189–210; K. Wildner, 'El Zócalo. Geschichte und Identität im urbanen Raum der Stadt Mexiko', in W. Kokot *et al*. (eds.), *Kulturwissenschaftliche Stadtforschung. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Berlin, 2000), 153–66.

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where a variety of urban interest groups 'compete for representation and appropriation of this material and imagined centre'.[66]

Similarly, yet without theoretical ambitions or methodological traceability, Mesonero Romanos, Dickens and other contemporary sketch writers dealt with the multiple symbolic, performative and material dimensions of public spaces. Writing about social types, symbolic practices and characteristic objects as they unfolded on a city's streets and places, as well as about material and urbanistic aspects, enabled them to reflect on selected issues of the transforming metropolis, on the one hand, and to provide entertaining accounts thereof, on the other, which was a constant requirement of the market-oriented periodicals. Which places of the city were selected to be described and commented on was dependent on the author's and periodical's orientation, as were the conclusions drawn from certain aspects of urban public life. Dickens' journalistic work, for instance, covers various different districts of the city of London and a wide range of social groups, not infrequently in order to exercise social criticism. Mesonero Romanos' interest, in contrast, was primarily directed towards the new urban middle classes and their places of encounter, and he was widely delighted by the spectacle the growing city offered to the observer.[67]

Mesonero Romanos' article 'El Prado' (1832)[68] exemplifies a group of sketches that were designed to entertain a readership that was deeply familiar with the elements they depicted. The sketch pictures a scene in which different social types, material objects and behaviours come together at the boulevard Paseo del Prado, a site of middle- and upper-class leisure. Mesonero Romanos begins his text by tracing a brief history of the boulevard. This historical introduction includes a long quote from a sixteenth-century testimonial, which Mesonero Romanos contrasts with the appearance of the Paseo del Prado of his time. Accordingly, the splendour of the boulevard increased due to newly installed fountains and the construction of pretentious museums. Human manners and dress codes, on the other hand, lost the pomposity of the imperial era. When the narrator[69] focuses his attention on a concrete and tangible scene on this 'fecund field for the observer',[70] he invites the reader to picture a lively situation. 'Let's imagine it [the Paseo del Prado] during one of these peaceful summer evenings, when, once siesta time is gone…[the Prado] starts to become the point of general encounter.'[71] Mesonero

[66] *Ibid*., 153.
[67] E. Rubio Cremades, *Periodismo y literatura: Ramón de Mesonero Romanos y el Semanario Pintoresco Español* (Valencia, 1995).
[68] R. de Mesonero Romanos, 'El Prado' (1833), in Mesonero Romanos, *Escenas matritenses*, 49–55.
[69] Like Mesonero Romanos, many sketch authors elaborated on the narrative instance of their texts. The narrator created by Mesonero Romanos is named 'El curioso parlante' (The curious talker), which implies the qualities of innate nosiness and the talent of narrating.
[70] Mesonero Romanos, 'El Prado', 53.
[71] *Ibid*., 52.

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Romanos describes a variety of elements (dresses, types, gestures, objects, conversations) that could be observed at this time of the day. With regard to the different forms of transportation, for instance, he depicts 'the confusing mix of our ancient customs with those imitated from foreign countries…: behind an elegant tilbury that was produced in London or Brussels…sluggishly drags itself a half-oval and dark green box, which master Medina could easily have called *carriage* in the sixteenth century, and in the nineteenth century we call it *simón*, a genuine mobile anachronism'.[72] From the various types of coaches, Mesonero Romanos turns to 'the diverse symptoms of vanity'.[73] Alluding to the dynamics of social distinction and their effects of socio-spatial segregation, Mesonero Romanos remarks that:

> the elegant people who don't have a vehicle [and] would take it very badly to be confused with the crowd…prefer to gather at a defined square adjacent to the passage of carriages…They chose this small site as the most suitable place in order to preserve a certain correspondence with the sublime society that passes by on their seats.[74]

The narrator also observes the abundant exchange of non-verbal signs, mentioning, for instance, 'the amorous intrigues..., the furtive looks of the girls, the intelligent smiles of the lads,...the expressive greetings'.[75] Then he notices two 'elegant sticklers [rigoristas], who artificially apply foreign fashions of clothing, behaving and speaking'.[76] As is the case in many journalistic sketches, Mesonero Romanos includes an entertaining dialogue. He records how the two 'sticklers' talk gossip about another passer-by and his wife, whom they consider to be too young for him, before they leave the place with three women they finally had been able to pick up to spend the evening.[77]

Dickens' sketch 'The streets – morning' (1836) takes stock of different types, who are socially distant from each other, as they come together on a street in central London, following the course of a day from morning until noon. The article starts by evoking the 'solitary desolation about the noiseless streets'[78] before sunrise. Even 'the last houseless vagrant whom penury and police have left in the streets, has coiled up his chilly limbs in some paved corner, to dream of food and warmth…The drunken, the dissipated, and the wretched have disappeared; the more sober and orderly part of the population have not yet awakened to the labours of the day'.[79] As it gets later, 'the streets, by almost imperceptible degrees,

[72] *Ibid.*
[73] *Ibid.*, 53.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Ibid.*
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*, 54.
[78] C. Dickens, 'The streets – morning', in Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, 238–42, at 38.
[79] *Ibid.*

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begin to resume their bustle and animation'.[80] Dickens portrays this gradual awakening with a sequence of images. There are, for example, the '[m]arket cars [that] roll slowly along',[81] 'numbers of men and women (principally the latter), carrying upon their heads heavy baskets of fruit, til down the park side of Piccadilly, on their way to Covent-garden',[82] and '[h]ere and there, a bricklayer's labourer, with the day's dinner tied up in a handkerchief, walks briskly to his work'.[83] Dickens also pays attention to the sounds of this time of the day: '[M]en are shouting, carts backing, horses neighing, boys fighting, basket-women talking, piemen expatiating on the excellence of their pastry, and donkeys braying. These and a hundred other sounds form a compound discordant enough to a Londoner's ears.'[84] Later on, the wealthier inhabitants of the surrounding houses wake up, the coach office gets populated, the shop apprentice cleans the pavement in front of the store, cabs and hackney coaches fill up the streets and 'the early clerk population of Somers and Camden towns, Islington, and Pentonville, are fast pouring into the city'.[85] As Dickens describes the clerks hastening towards their offices, he inserts critical considerations on wage conditions and, again, urban anonymity:

> Middle-aged men, whose salaries have by no means increased in the same proportion as their families, plod steadily along, apparently with no object in view but the counting-house; knowing by sight almost everybody they meet or overtake, for they have seen them every morning (Sundays excepted) during the last twenty years, but speaking to no one. If they do happen to overtake a personal acquaintance, they just exchange a hurried salutation, and keep walking on either by his side, or in front of him, as his rate of walking may chance to be.[86]

The text ends when the preparations for the workday have been completed. Everybody has arrived at his or her workstation, the shops and their tenants are cleaned up and the carts and horses have disappeared. The sketch finishes with the observation that '[t]he streets are thronged with a vast concourse of people, gay and shabby, rich and poor, idle and industrious, and we come to the head, bustle, and activity of Noon'.[87]

Whereas the sketch 'El Prado' describes the material environments, objects, social types, ways of dressing and the bodily and verbal forms of language that come together at an emblematic place of urban leisure, 'The streets – morning' focuses on representing the happenings on a central street, where the features of modern working life become particularly manifest. In both texts, as in many other examples of sociographic journalism, representations of urban spaces are employed

[80] *Ibid.*, 39.
[81] *Ibid.*
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] *Ibid.*
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] *Ibid.*, 41.
[86] *Ibid.*
[87] *Ibid.*, 42.

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to approach entertainingly the contemporary experience of urbanity that is characterized by an unprecedented human density and an ever more differentiated world of symbols and practices. When these texts grasp the social atmosphere of paradigmatic places, they not only provide ethnographic information about material and sociocultural dimensions of urban life, but open up an intimate field of contemporary urban experience. Audience-focused sociographic journalism was, then, required to correspond with the interests of readers. Accordingly, the authors' selection and arrangement of topics, as well as their frequent personal commentary, offer multiple insights into the ways that urban spaces were experienced by wealthier urbanites, who were the target audience of multithematic periodicals.[88]

Examinations of urban circumstances and developments

As was the case with Dickens and Mesonero Romanos, many journalists were engaged in political institutions or scientific associations and defended specific interests in their writings. Consequently, the sketches frequently connected with contemporary debates on social issues, culture, politics and urban reform. Mesonero Romanos, who came from a wealthy and influential family and became a member of the city council in the 1840s, was largely satisfied with the cultural and architectural transformations he registered in the Spanish capital. His sketches represent urban life and environments in a mostly complacent manner and only sometimes take issue with the heavy impact of French fashion on the city's everyday culture, the artificiality of the urban middle and upper classes' manners and individual aspects of the urban infrastructure.[89] The social question is widely ignored in his texts. In the rare instances Mesonero Romanos paid attention to the popular classes, he merely considered them as the picturesque resistance against cultural homogenization.[90] Dickens, in contrast, dedicated a significant part of his journalistic work to denouncing the conditions of the urban lower classes.[91]

[88] Fred Schwarzbach has shown that Dickens' urban sketches were received as faithful accounts of London life by readers and critics: Schwarzbach, *Dickens and the City*, 33.

[89] See, for example, the sketches 'La capa vieja y el baile del candil' ('The old cloak and the village dance', 1833), 'Antes, ahora y después' ('Before, now and after', 1837), 'El cesante' ('The unemployed civil servant', 1837), 'El alquiler de un cuarto' ('Renting a room', 1837) and 'El gabán' ('The overcoat', 1840).

[90] See F. Anderson, 'Madrid, los balcones y la historia: Mesonero Romanos y Pérez Galdós', *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos*, 464 (1989), 63–75. This attitude corresponds with that of the large part of Madrid's upper and bourgeois classes, which virtually overlooked the problems caused by social inequality until the 1870s: C. Díez de Baldeón, 'Barrios obreros en el Madrid del siglo XIX. ¿Solución o amenaza para el orden burgués?', in Otero Carvajal and Bahamond (eds.), *Madrid en la sociedad del siglo XIX*, 117–34.

[91] Schwarzbach *Dickens and the City*, 31–42. See, as examples, the sketches 'The drunkard's death' (1836), 'Seven Dials' (1836), 'The pawnbroker's shop' (1836), 'Meditations in Monmouth-street' (1836), 'A visit to Newgate' (1836) and 'Gin shops' (1836).

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In 'Policía urbana' ('Urban policy', 1833),[92] Mesonero Romanos uses a city walk as his basic unit of representation to comment on urban reforms. Besides providing rich ethnographic information on the state of the streets of Madrid in the 1830s, the article reflects his desire for a faster progression of reforms as well as his optimism towards the city's future. 'I left my house without a fixed destiny', the text begins, 'at the time entertaining my peaceful mind with the variety of animated scenes [cuadros] that the streets of Madrid offer.'[93] On his walk, the narrator notes visible improvements to the city's infrastructure. He sees, for instance, the 'public places cleared from the unhealthy dirt that was caused by the food sale'[94] and is delighted by the 'good architecture of fountains and modern gates [puertas modernas]'.[95] These transformations remind him of other ongoing urban projects: 'that of public lighting, the well system, the gorgeous theatre, and similar things, which make the capital hope for its future growth'.[96] The narrator proclaims 'the most sincere tribute of admiration and gratitude to the authorities of Madrid'.[97] However, describing how he continued his walk on another, particularly rainy, day in the second part of the sketch, he receives a fundamentally different impression. As he encounters multiple unpleasant situations, the narrator starts to complain about the slowness of urban reform. For instance, he gets frustrated by the muddy streets and the floods of water that hit the heads of the passers-by.[98] He is upset by the old-fashioned way in which houses are numbered in this town, as well as the impossibility of hiring a cab for less than half a day.[99] Moreover, his peace is disturbed by 'the cries of the street vendors, sharp and dissonant'[100] and 'the disputes of the watersellers at the wells'.[101] The passages are interrupted by 'grids that stand out and threaten the shoulders of the adults and the heads of the little ones'.[102] The walker has to give way to 'oxen carrying coal and straw'[103] and to 'the inevitable droppings of the equestrian bakers'.[104] To the narrator, 'all these and other things that were to be observed on the streets and boulevards throughout the day ended up completing my displeasure'.[105] When he continues his walk at night, so too does his bewilderment. The lanterns are not bright enough to find one's way, paths

[92] R. de Mesonero Romanos, 'Policía urbana' (1833), in Mesonero Romanos, *Escenas matritenses*, 180–6.
[93] *Ibid*., 180.
[94] *Ibid*., 181.
[95] *Ibid*.
[96] *Ibid*.
[97] *Ibid*.
[98] *Ibid*., 183.
[99] *Ibid*., 184.
[100] *Ibid*., 185.
[101] *Ibid*.
[102] *Ibid*.
[103] *Ibid*.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] *Ibid*.

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are impaired by construction sites and dubious figures disturb the peace of the night. Nevertheless, when the narrator arrives at home, 'finally freed from the past annoyances',[106] and reconsiders his walk through the city, his mood improves. He concludes that his complaints partly result from the plentiful laudable urban reforms of recent years:

> I reflected on the enormous improvements that the city has seen over the course of a few years; I acknowledged that these are the causes of current claims concerning the deficiencies that we still notice, which – in a huge town like this – cannot be amended in an instant, and I fell asleep, satisfied with the flattering perspective that the authorities' zeal will work on their improvement each single day.[107]

Dickens' article 'Gin shops' (1836) presents a very different example of how journalistic sketches construct ethnographic units and combine descriptive passages with comments on contemporary urban conditions. The sketch first deals with novel strategies of marketing in public space and the equipment of shops and public houses with new materials and light technologies.[108] The glamorous appearance of the remodelled gin houses contrasts strongly with their urban environments: 'they are invariably numerous and splendid in precise proportion to the dirt and poverty of the surrounding neighbourhoods. The gin-shops in and near Drury-Lane, Holborn, St Gile's, Covent-garden and Clare-market, are the handsomest in London. There is more filth and squalid misery near those great thorough-fares than in any part of this mighty city.'[109] Subsequently, the author invites the reader into a concrete situation: 'We will endeavour to sketch the bar of a large gin-shop, and its ordinary customers…and on the chance of finding one well suited to our purpose, we will make for Drury Lane.'[110] Dickens draws the reader's attention to the fact that in order to get there, they first must pass

> the narrow streets and dirty courts which divide it from Oxford-street…The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper: every room let out to a different family, and in many instances to two or even three…; starvation in the attics…; filth everywhere…; boys of all ages, in coats of all sizes and no coats at all.[111]

After describing the squalor of the surrounding areas of Drury Lane, Dickens takes the reader back to the main motif of the gin-shop: '[y]ou turn the corner. What a change! All is light and brilliancy…the gay building with the fantastically ornamented parapet, the illuminated clock, the plate-glass windows surrounded by stucco rosettes…is perfectly dazzling when

[106] *Ibid*., 186.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] C. Dickens, 'Gin shops', in Dickens, *Sketches by Boz*, 142–6.
[109] *Ibid*., 144.
[110] *Ibid*.
[111] *Ibid*.

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contrasted with the darkness and dirt we have just left.'[112] The interior of the gin-shop looks 'even gayer than the exterior';[113] nevertheless, the establishment's guests seem less fancy. Especially in the evening – the remaining public is only made out of 'wretched-looking creatures'[114] who seem to be 'in the last stage of emaciation and disease'.[115] Dickens now includes a plot, the main characters of which constitute a 'knot of Irish labourers at the lower end of the place, who have been alternately shaking hands with, and threatening the life of each other'.[116] One belligerent man from this group creates a 'scene of riot and confusion';[117] the landlord intervenes and gets beaten; 'the barmaids scream; the police come in; the rest is a confused mixture of arms, legs, staves, torn coats, shouting, and struggling'.[118] Although this scene, in a way, might read like an amusing report, this was not Dickens' intention. When he wraps up the plot, his tone becomes cynical: '[s]ome of the party are borne off to the station-house, and the remainder slink home to beat their wives for complaining, and kick the children for daring to be hungry'.[119] The text concludes with a clear statement: pauperism is the basic reason for the proliferation of gin shops:

> Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are a greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance which, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour.[120]

The texts 'Policía urbana' and 'Gin shops' exemplify, beyond their thematic and narrative differences, how the widely circulated periodical sketch was used to shape opinions on diverse issues of public urban life. What unites these and other journalistic sketches that examine contemporary urban conditions is that they address tangible subjects and experiences; they also combine different sociographic forms, such as documentary descriptions, amusing scenes and political commentaries. This versatility was the formula of the genre's commercial success: the journalistic sketches, on the one hand, met the reader's curiosity of inspecting the radical political, material and cultural transformations of urbanizing societies by reflecting, often amusingly, the public's own experiences of urban spaces. On the other hand, many sketches combined these elements with considerations on societal processes and stimulated the readership to form certain views on a variety of sociocultural and political aspects. Being situated between

[112] *Ibid*.
[113] *Ibid*.
[114] *Ibid*., 145.
[115] *Ibid*.
[116] *Ibid*.
[117] *Ibid*., 146.
[118] *Ibid*.
[119] *Ibid*.
[120] *Ibid*.

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entertainment, ethnography of daily experiences and cultural/political comment, the sketches could be received in multiple ways and satisfy an ever growing and more diverse readership.

Conclusion

Like thousands of journalists working during the nineteenth century, Mesonero Romanos and Dickens left a rich corpus of documentary texts on everyday urban life. The vivid sketches, which appeared in innumerable journals and magazines in the growing European cities, address the ambiguous experience of urban density and differentiation, the dynamics of social distinction, transport systems, leisure activities, clothing habits, speech modes, housing and working conditions and the effects of pauperism. The examples examined in this article show how the sketch authors approached the multifacetedness of the city through representations of selected places, situations, behaviours and types; how they drew on depictions of public spaces in order to grasp urban density, diversity and tensions; and how they used, according to their political views, the descriptive-entertaining genre to evaluate urban transformations and social conditions and to connect with public debates.

Considering the vast tradition of early nineteenth-century urban journalism, it is striking that the genre has not been recognized as a form of social knowledge either in urban history or in the disciplinary historiographies of sociology and sociocultural anthropology.[121] Until today, sociological scholarship is reluctant to acknowledge literary-journalistic texts as integral parts of its tradition, which David Frisby explains with the necessity of positioning sociology as an 'exact' human science.[122] Contrary to this point of view, Frisby and Giampaolo Nuvolati have reassessed the studies of the Chicago School, which combined 'scientific' approaches with journalistic forms of representation, as an exemplary, ideal urban sociology that produces more experience-based and true-to-life representations of urban complexities.[123] They also refer to the nineteenth-century concept of literary *flânerie* to promote a form of urban sociology that blends traditional sociological data with narratives about everyday practices of the urbanites.[124] With the purpose in mind of strengthening micro-analytical and sensual approaches towards social

[121] There is one exception: the journalist, playwright and publisher Henry Mayhew (1812–87) has been discovered as a precursor of critical urban study: C. Herbert, *Culture and Anomie. Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London, 1991), 205–52.

[122] D. Frisby, *Cityscape of Modernity* (Cambridge, 2001), 29.

[123] *Ibid.*; G. Nuvolati, 'The flâneur and the city: object and subject of sociological analysis', in V. Mele, *Sociology, aesthetics and the city* (Pisa, 2011), 143–62.

[124] Although Nuvolati's and Frisby's references to the *flâneur* do not go beyond Walter Benjamin's thoughts on *flânerie* and Baudelaire's famous essay 'The painter of modern life' (first published in 1863), the concept of *flânerie* as a form of urban observation was already an established literary motif in the 1830s: R.D.E. Burton, *The Flâneur and his City. Patterns of Daily Life in Paris 1815–1851* (Durham, 1994), 2; J. David, 'Les ontologies urbaines de

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life and culture, to sift the tradition of urban journalism of the first half of the nineteenth century offers multiple methodological and content-related stimuli.

Within the discipline of sociocultural anthropology, the writings of figures like Dickens and Mesonero Romanos have also been neglected, if not to say disregarded – despite their particularly strong similarities with ethnographic texts. In part, this lack of interest can be explained by the self-image of sociocultural anthropology as a discipline that is primarily concerned with distant cultures as well as the fact that it tends to neglect pre-disciplinary developments.[125] Moreover, in contrast to contemporary sociological urban studies, there seems to be less of a need to look at historical models (such as *flânerie*) for methodological innovation. Anthropological approaches towards urban life have been much more flexible ever since 'the city' became a disciplinary topic from the 1950s onwards.[126] Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the main focus of sociocultural anthropology has been to explore cultural expressions among rather small groups, and fieldwork was established as the leading method of the new academic discipline. The primary characteristics of this method – getting involved with the 'field', actively taking part in the events and daily lives of the group of study, documenting interactional processes, ideas and material structures and interpreting the forces of culture behind these manifestations[127] – are very similar to those of the strolling journalist (and to early notions of *flânerie*). Hence, there seems to be less need to dig out historical-literary forms of social observation to get closer to the dimension of everyday experience.

Nevertheless, since there is also a steady discussion about the qualities of ethnographic representation and, more specifically, the boundaries between ethnography and literature in sociocultural anthropology,[128] it remains a stimulating task to evaluate the different representational techniques of early sociographic journalism. Moreover, examining historical forms of ethnography and cultural critique enables us to develop a challenging reflexivity that goes beyond the personal, self-centred forms of methodological self-reflection in sociocultural anthropology. Finally, exploring urban journalism as an ethnographic activity might challenge

la littérature: l'exemple de la flânerie parisienne avant Baudelaire', *Le Globe*, 152 (2012), 23–42, at 38.

[125] Certainly, there are exceptional cases of studies that go beyond the phase of disciplinary institutionalization. See G.W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York 1987); S. Moravia, 'The Enlightenment and the sciences of man', *History of Science*, 18 (1980), 247–68.

[126] See G.B. Prato and I. Pardo, 'Urban anthropology', *Urbanities*, 3 (2013), 80–110; one interesting example is Marc Augé's study *In the Metro* (first published in French in 1986), where the author adopts the perspective of the directionless *flâneur* and takes his readers on a very personal journey through the Parisian underground.

[127] N. Bonvillain, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd edn (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2010), 54–7.

[128] M. Lancione, 'The ethnographic novel as activist mode of existence: translating the field with homeless people and beyond', *Social and Cultural Geography*, 18 (2017), 994–1015; K. Visweswaran, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography* (Minneapolis, 1994).

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traditional disciplinary narratives, which largely ignore ethnographic studies 'at home'.[129]

This article has taken the journalistic work by Ramón de Mesonero Romanos and Charles Dickens as an example to disclose a vast European tradition of urban observation and ethnography. To unearth this genuinely transnational corpus of urban research offers the prospect of shedding new light on how the transforming city was experienced in everyday situations and how it was represented in popular media. Furthermore, this task promises to narrate stories about the cross-cultural history of social knowledge formation and its development between popular and academic discourse as well as find historical-comparative ways of criticizing contemporary frames of representation in all branches of social study.

[129] Some deliberations on these interdependencies were made with regard to Henry Mayhew's interpretations of London's street population. See S. Shesgreen, *Images of the Outcast. The Urban Poor in the Cries of London* (Manchester, 2002), 169ff; Herbert, *Culture and Anomie*, 205–52.

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