Six Lines: A Methodological Agenda for Critical Gang Studies

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Abstract

In the twenty-first century, the established methodological props for gang research have worn increasingly thin. Place-based definitions involving territorial groups confined to neighbourhood fiefdoms have become increasingly fractured, as shifts in social life increasingly overwhelm and undercut such approaches. This paper seeks to offer a new methodological agenda for transnational gang studies that is premised on the significance of *mobility* and *flow*. The paper first sets out a review of existing approaches, drawing on three established lines in critical gang studies—vertical, horizontal and parallel—which are rooted in place. Next, we suggest three emergent lines—circular, radial and transversal—which are designed to interrogate dynamics of mobility and technology in global gang studies. We suggest, in conclusion, that methods based on 'flow' should not replace those rooted in 'place' but must operate in a dialogue between online and terrestrial space, paying close attention to the role technology plays in shaping social interaction.

Introduction

In the twentieth century, the criminological imaginary of gangs was rooted in place. In the foundational work of Frederic Thrasher (1927), for example, gangs emerged as an informal community structure within strictly defined urban territories; a "mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpellate" (p. 6). They were approached as a localised feature of the urban landscape that emerged in the shadow of industrialisation, hemmed in by geography and circumstance (Thrasher 1927, 1963). As later critics have pointed out, however, this localized approach failed to fully recognize the ways in which broader "political, economic and historical forces" (Snodgrass, 1976, p. 10) were at work in the patterning of city life. By the turn of the twenty-first century, critical gang scholars had started to develop sophisticated accounts in which urban space and gang identity were increasingly shaped by transnational forces. As Hagedorn summarised, '[j]ust as gangs in Frederic Thrasher's time were closely related to urbanization,

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immigration, and industrialization, gangs today cannot be understood apart from an analysis of globalization' (Hagedorn 2007, p. 13). These turn-of-the-millennium studies stressed the globalised nature of urban disadvantage, and the comparability in dynamics of exclusion and identity across time and space, as well as presaging the rise of technology. As Hagedorn noted, at the dawn of the digital era, 'stereotypes of gangs are no more than a mouse click away (1999, p. 610).

Today, however, mouse clicks have been replaced by phone-swipes and increasingly, urban space is being conceived not as discrete, static entities but rather as splintered, fragmented and interconnected, 'complex spaces of flows' (Streule 2019). Against this backdrop, the ground beneath the feet of gang researchers has shifted once more. What were once discrete neighbourhood groups have been recognized as collective responses to social conditions that are intimately connected (Brotherton and Flynn 2008; Hagedorn 2007), with researchers starting to develop new gang conceptualisations beyond place while re-imagining between offline and online contexts. While some effort has been made to develop gang research that attends to these shifts, studies seldom tend to remain rooted in the 'space of place' (Castells 2000) which fails to recognise the intimate connectivity of gangs across cultural, virtual, and geographical domains. As a result, conventional methodological approaches to gang studies still tend to fall foul of the 'methodological nationalism' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2009) that has persistently hampered global social science.

In this paper, we set out a methodological agenda for global gang studies that seek out new tools to study gangs in the context of accelerating technological change. This attends not only to hallmark conceptual work conducted in the early part of the new millennium but also emerging empirical work that is sensitised to questions of glocalisation (Roudometof 2016), liquidity (Bauman 2000), and mobility (Sheller and Urry 2006). This effort at systematisation is intended to recentre the study of gangs at the intersection between the so-called 'space of place' and 'space of flow' (Castells 2000). In so doing we seek to resituate the imaginary of gangs from the hyper-localism of Thrasher's Chicago to the telescoping 'hall of mirrors' in which social relations, mediated interaction and technological connectivity fuse in the emergence of violent street cultures. As Ferrell et al. note, in this world 'the street scripts the screen and the screen scripts the street: there is no clear linear sequence, but rather a shifting interplay between the real and the virtual, the factual and the fictional' (Ferrell et al. 2008, p. 124). We aim to demonstrate not only the growing significance of cultural, technological and digital flows in gangs' social life, or the ongoing salience of place but of hybrid, 'glocalised' social forms (Roudometof 2016) forged between online and offline interactions. This alternative conceptualisation, we believe, encourages innovative ways to enhance the transnational scope of critical gang studies.

The paper first offers a theoretical reflection of what we see as the two most significant changes in the 'space of flow' since Castells' seminal work (2000). In the last decades, global migration has accelerated and intensified, giving way to a substantial change in the patterned movement of populations and migration policies. Next, the paper discusses how the rapid acceleration of digital infrastructure, swipe technologies, social media and algorithmic intelligence has created a series of dynamic entanglements between global online and local offline worlds. Both have radically reconfigured the nature of social life in researchers' field sites and affect gang dynamics at the global and local level. Building on this analysis, we then set out three established 'lines' in global gang studies that aim to transcend the boundaries of place through comparison. Subsequently, we draw on three emergent 'lines' of comparison that capture the mobile, contingent and non-linear nature of contemporary gang identities.

Gangs, Glocalisation and Flow

During the early forays of Thrasher and the Chicago School, gangs were approached as a relatively benign, localised and inevitable feature of the urban landscape (Thrasher 1927, 1963). Street gangs were one form of institution—alongside families, social clubs, restaurants, and associations—that emerged from the pattern of settlement and community-building. Writing at the turn of the millennium, Hagedorn and colleagues noted significant shifts in the nature and form of urban life since Thrasher's era, with consequences for gang research. For Hagedorn (2008), globalisation had accelerated and amplified the pre-conditions of gang formation, creating forms of 'advanced marginality' and socio-spatial exclusion that were transnational in reach and global in cause.[1] Nonetheless, as the title of the collection 'Gangs in the Global City' suggests, the unit of analysis was primarily place-based.

In the 20 years since the conference that propelled that collection, the rise of mobile technologies has been audacious. Distinctions between 'offline' and 'online' selves have become increasingly nullified by a world of constant connectivity and spillover between virtual and real-world domains, demanding conceptual attentiveness to the interaction between local, global and virtual domains. In what follows, we outline two primary 'global flows' that have started to overwhelm and undercut the global city as primary unit of analysis and which require researchers to rethink their methodological tools. The first, a human and workforce flow, captures important social dynamics that were already present in the early part of the millennium, but which have intensified. Today, the movement and securitisation of migrant populations, overlaid onto an increasingly precarious and fluid economic and educational climate, have substantially altered the contextual environment in which gangs originate. The second, a technology and media flow takes the global connectedness and social interaction between humans to a new level, creating a space that is seen as 'anti-spatial' (Mitchell 1995, p. 8), or without spatio-temporal restrictions. The latter problematises the ecological approach to gangs as 'the spatial (and temporal) localization of persons, objects and activities is a core presupposition of its explanatory schema' (Yar 2005, p. 414). Gang members today gain respect and "street capital" (Bucerius 2014; Sandberg and Pederson 2011) not from the interstitial urban places (Thrasher 1929) but in the hinterland between online and offline contexts (Lane 2018).

Mobility, Flow and the 'Migrant Other'

Large-scale population shifts from rural to urban environments and from Old to New World have been replaced by a cycle of international flow and more complex forms of stratification and control. Economic polarization, global conflict, population growth (now over 6 billion, rising at a rate of approximately 86 million per year), and ease of transportation have accelerated global migration to an unprecedented extent. Migration has not only globalized and proliferated; it has also become increasingly feminized, politicized, and differentiated (Castles and Miller 2009, pp. 11–12). At the same time, national responses to migration have changed considerably. Developed nations have increasingly sought to

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[1] Hagedorn (2008) has drawn powerfully on the technosocial network theory of Manuel Castells to elaborate a globalised 'resistance identity', in the form of hip-hop, that allowed similarly oppressed street groups a shared vocabulary of dissent.

enforce strict border policies, criminalizing immigration for those seen as unproductive to economic development, with deportation or imprisonment the ultimate consequence. These shifts in migration flows and responses to human mobility have had important implications for the study of gangs. As Rodgers and Hazen (2014) note, in an era of global migration, it would be surprising "if gang members never migrated" (p. 2). Multiple gang studies have shown that the crimmigration policies of Western nation-states also affect gang issues in the countries of origin. Brotherton and Barrios (2011), for instance, have detailed the process through which deportation policies of the United States have had ripple effects for gangs not only in the United States but also in Latin America, with comparable processes in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Dominican Republic (Levenson-Estrada 2013; Zilberg 2011).

Moreover, the movement of populations has increased the connectedness of gang identity across borders. While traditionally identity work was mainly confined to neighbourhoods, it now increasingly occurs within transnational communities. In the context of a "highly mobile, stratified and globalizing society" in which marginalized groups must maintain identity and community, some groups traditionally conceived as local gangs, such as the New York-based Almighty Latin King and Queen Nation (ALKQN), have developed into a transnational street organizations (Brotherton 2007, p. 378). They are processes which reside at the heart of globalisation dynamics and because of that, globalisation has impacted local gang realities, not only in connectedness to global economic markets but also the way it impacted traditional working-class identities (Feixa et al 2008). Overall this means that the borders of gang field sites in which these processes, are studied, which has been traditionally within the borders of the city, have become increasingly permeable and porous.

A further point of attention is how local gang realities interact with global human mobility as a workforce flow in a globalised economy. For White (2011), commonalities amongst gangs in a global context interact with processes of social exclusion, marginalization, criminalization, and racialization. From the favelas of Rio de Janeiro to the banlieues of Paris, the communities, in which gangs reside, house so-called urban outcasts composed of poor migrant populations, ethnic minority groups, and socially marginalized youth (Wacquant 2008). Here, the underside of the global city is still the experience of "advanced marginality" in which large populations are contained within the urban or peri-urban periphery (Wacquant 2008). However, a globalised human workforce altered the experience and outlook of urban marginality with precaritized work in the gig economy interweaving with informal labour in the illicit economy. As Aas (2010) notes, "globalization, far from being a progress of global mobility and de-territorialisation, also represents immobility, re-territorialisation, and localization" (p. 427). For those locked in the margins of the global city, subsisting in the urban periphery, constructed as the "racialised outsider" (Virdee 2014), the gang can represent a place of identity and safety, as well as cultural repertoire (Bakkali 2021).

Technology, Media and the 'Digital Street'

Technology has increased the rapidity, access and scale of communication. Worldwide access to information fostered by technological innovation marks the transition from the post-industrial society to the contemporary information society (Castells 2000). The information society is also referred to as "the network society," which has a sense of "placeless connectivity"—anywhere, anytime, and always the user is "in touch" with the network

(Angell 1995, p. 10). That connectivity increased still more with the arrival of mobile technology and smartphones. As such social lives are increasingly coordinated in a simultaneously online and offline manner, maintaining physical interaction while chatting or messaging with friends online. Online and offline worlds are no longer seen as ontologically distinct orders or experiential universes, but rather dimensions that converge. Beyond global migration, technology and media have opened up corridors of global dialogue and interaction between disparate cultures and communities in ways that are both emergent and inchoate, with social interactions increasingly defined by simultaneously "virtual-real" engagements.

The digital revolution has given rise to the development of network perspectives, in which scholars have noted the eagerness of gang members to adopt the newest "communication technologies" (Conquergood 1994). The "pager-beeper" of the 1990s has given way to an "online gangland" (Van Hellemont 2012) and the rise of the "digital street" (Lane 2018) composed of mobile devices and social media. From "Twitter Beefs" (Ilan 2012), to gangs' YouTube performances (Mendoza-Denton 2015), the online environment has had a profound impact on gang communication and thus its constitutive meaning-making process (Stuart 2019). In meditating and facilitating their creations on a global scale (Hagedorn 2008), the "digital streets" now make gang representations but "a swipe away" for multiple audiences. Added to this, cultural and critical criminologists have noted how a global fashion industry relies on gang symbolism 'to add 'street coolness' to affluent consumer identities (Ilan 2015) or how a corporate entertainment industry' relies on gang connotations to sell seductive commodities (Brotherton 2015, pp. 124, 125) such as music, video game, and films (Metcalf 2009). In a global mediascape, 'gangster' style has become a fashion brand, at times indistinguishable from other urban youth cultures (Ilan 2015).

The shifts set out in this section have significant and far-reaching implications for the study of gangs in a global context. In what follows we document a range of existing and emerging methodological approaches to the recentring of gang research towards the 'space of flow' (Castells 2000).

Six Lines: A Methodological Agenda

Since the time of the Chicago School, observational methods have come to be seen as the quintessential methodology for studying urban issues, particularly as framed through the lens of gangs. Though statistical comparisons can establish broad-based similarity and difference, intuiting gang dynamics requires the time, proximity and depth of understanding that ethnography allows (Wacquant 2008). However, in recent years, place-based ethnographies have been thrown into crisis as populations, cultures, and identities are forged on the move between real and virtual environments. What were once discrete, street-based youth groups have reconfigured in the global era to actors in a globalised economy, transnational diasporas formed through deportation, or digital networks with hybrid identities.

In what follows we develop a comparative approach to critical gang studies that coheres a range of recent studies into a methodological framework. Understanding the contemporary gang phenomenon as rooted in a combination of digital networks, social relations, and cultural flow, we argue, demands a methodological reorientation that moves gang scholarship away from isolated local studies and towards a collaborative, networked, and comparative theoretical and methodological agenda. In making this argument we delineate six 'lines' of existing and emergent approaches. The first three approaches, which we refer to

	Fieldsite	Mode	Fieldwork	Time-Space
1. Vertical	1	Urban, static	Solo	Single
2. Horizontal	1	Urban, static	Solo	Multiple
3. Parallel	2	Urban, static	Solo/cooperative	Single
4 Circular	2+	Urban, mobile	Reciprocal	Multiple
5. Transversal	2+	Virtual/urban, static	Collaborative	Single
6. Radial	1+	Virtual/urban, mobile	Solo/ collaborative	Multiple

Fig. 1 Six lines of methodological approach

as 'established', are rooted in an imaginary of gangs rooted in place. As gang identities have become more mobile, contingent and non-linear, we argue, researchers must become increasingly attentive to factors that increase the flow nature of gangs. As such, in the second section, we draw together a range of emergent 'lines' of research that operate at the intersection of place and flow, and that better capture the mobile, contingent and non-linear nature of contemporary gang identities. Figure 1. summarises the mode, form of fieldwork, and time–space position for each. The following section elaborates the lines in more depth.

Established Lines

The first three approaches are based fundamentally on the notion of stability of populations, identities and urban subcultures—in which gangs are fixed points on the urban landscape that can be approximated through linear comparisons. Whether applying a consensus definition, extending back through time, or outward through space, fieldwork tends to be confined to a single neighbourhood. The implicit assumption is that gangs are static, hyperlocal, territorial groups with whom long-term, close-up, localised observation is most appropriate.

Vertical

Vertical studies are based on a single study, in a single site, in a single time–space that connects with a larger set of hypotheses or questions, and that seeks to contribute to a body of global or comparative work. The quintessential instance of this approach is that of the Eurogang programme of research, which sets out agreed universal formalised definitional criteria to comparative study, 'any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity' (van Gemert 2005, p. 148). This definition is operationalised through standardised research instruments which are then applied in a top-down manner. According to this definition, there are identifiable gangs in a range of European cities, exhibiting similar characteristics to their American counterparts. Critics of the Eurogang approach note that the term 'gang' does not easily map onto diverse contexts, and local differences are missed by a single definition (Aldridge et al. 2008). As Rodriguez et al. note of Venezuela, for example, adaptations of the definition—notably those relating to reputation for violence—are required to make sense of the local context. A vertical definitional shines a bright spotlight on specific areas but leaves everything else in shade.

To a certain extent, approaches to gangs premised on the concept of the 'global city' also invoke vertical reasoning, insofar as they are reliant on a theoretical conception of gangs that remains rooted in place. In brief, the global city thesis traces the relationship between economic globalisation and urban spatiality, with concentrations of wealth and poverty emerging in the wake of transnational financial markets (Sassen 2001, 2007). One impact of these global processes has been the growth of urban zones, or 'ghettos' that are cut off from the rest of the city. These perfidious zones of urban exclusion, resulting from what Wacquant terms 'advanced marginality', can result in a form of localised identity and territorialism 'that reflect the closure of one's lived universe' (Wacquant 2007, p. 271) offering fertile ground for marginalised and disillusioned youth to seek community and identity in gangs, As Davis (2008, p. xi) notes, for 'poor youth lacking other resources, these informal spatial monopolies, if successfully defended and consolidated, provide some measure of entrepreneurial opportunity as well as local prestige.'

While such accounts represent a critical optic through which to compare similar processes of urban exclusion and group formation, their concentration in a single place, and single time–space, create blind spots in terms of history, culture, and virtual communications and overlook the 'friction' that exists between local, global and virtual scales of analysis (Tsing 2005).

Horizontal

Horizontal studies are based on a single site but seek to analyse gangs across time in the same location. This may include the bringing together of contemporary fieldwork with archival research, or oral testimony, or it may take the form of a 'punctuated revisit', an anthropological approach in which 'the same ethnographer conducts separated stints of fieldwork in the same site over a number of years' (Burawoy 2003, p. 670). These studies tend to stick relatively close to ground level, telescoping back through time and seeking to understand social change through the lens of an individual gang, or city (Thrasher 1927; Hagedorn 2015). Hagedorn has termed this a *genealogical* approach to gangs, seeking 'lines of connection or parameters which make for a global relevance allowing "place-bound", necessarily always local, ethnographic writing to carry across the world' (Willis and Trondman 2000, p. 7). Such studies tend to operate on inductive analytical basis, and though not formalised into a comparative framework are capable of generating theoretical or conceptual developments that can be adapted for comparative analysis.

This form of historical literacy is an important counterpoint to studies of globalisation and new technology. Adamson (1998), for example, situates gangs in the context of medieval and feudal notions of tribute, turf and honour, arguing that capitalism has always co-existed alongside a system of 'tributary surplus extraction', and that 'territorially-based feuding has co-existed with the demilitarized, legalized competition of the free market' (Adamson 1998, p. 78). The forms of defensive localism embodied by gangs, therefore, represents a localised, urbanised form of these fundamental processes. Importantly this approach recognises that gangs not only exist in history but also that they themselves have history that exists apart from official discourse. As Brotherton suggests, 'to think about the gang in history requires us to consciously place the phenomenon we are describing in a set of intersecting, overlapping, unequal power relations' (Brotherton 2015, p. 11). For Brotherton, following E.P Thompson, there is a need to tell a 'history from below' in relation to gangs in different parts of the world—recognising that gangs themselves have histories and narratives that are often untold in the official narrative.

Parallel

Parallel studies involve the concurrent study of two or more field sites, by one or more researchers, with the intention of generating comparable data. Unlike vertical or horizontal studies, parallel approaches are often explicitly comparative in their design. Rather than starting with positivist, deductive reasoning, Wacquant's 'comparative sociology of urban marginality' (2008a, p. 9) between the 'hyper-ghetto' of Chicago and the *banlieue* of Paris, for example, seeks to compare geographically disparate sites inductively. As Wacquant argues, there is a pressing need to recognise the uneven, complex and variegated impact of global social forces at the level of lived experience, whilst recognising the impact of a divergent 'historical matrix of class, state and space characteristic of each society at a given epoch' (Wacquant 2008, p. 2). Similarly, Burawoy's collaborative ethnographic projects (2000, 2009) are rooted in efforts to comprehend the interconnected, yet disparate, social realities of global connectedness in multiple sites in the same time–space. This approach has also been employed by colleagues working in the Eurogang tradition of 'vertical' comparison, bringing separate studies into dialogue. The problem, of course, is that parallel lines never meet.

In the field of gang studies, Fraser and Hagedorn's (2018) recent study represents an exploratory example of a parallel methodology. In this study, the authors spent time in one another's field sites, with the 'home' researcher operating as a gatekeeper, guide, and critical friend during the field visit. As they argue, '[t]he beauty of the exchange is its' simplicity and efficiency: the hard-won access of the other researcher is shared and collectivised, allowing the visiting scholar a sharp insight into a social world that may diverge considerably from their own' (Fraser and Hagedorn 2018). In addition to the generation of inductive theory pertaining to the divergent patterning of gangs across time and space, this methodology is also significant for its implications for reflexivity. Spending time in another fieldsite changes perceptions, upsets taken-for-granted assumptions, and exposes gaps in the ethnographic gaze, which can prompt 'a reflexive return on the sociologist and on his/ her universe of production' (Wacquant 1989, p. 33). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 36) summarise the value of this form of reflexivity as follows:

> First, its primary target is not the individual analyst but the social and intellectual unconscious embedded in analytic tools and operations; second, it must be a collective enterprise rather than the burden of the lone academic; and, third, it seeks not to assault but to buttress the epistemological security of sociology.

Such efforts are, however, comparatively rare. As a result, current comparative knowledge pertaining to gangs in a global context presents a highly inconsistent and contradictory picture. As Heitmeyer et al. note, 'even the more developed literature on gangs has been undermined by an absence of studies comparing data temporally and spatially, between young people from different sociocultural contexts' (Heitmeyer et al. 2019, p. 2).

Emergent Lines

The second set of 'lines' that we identify in the contemporary literature relate to mobility and technology. In today's world of 'thrown togetherness' (Massey 2005), these approaches attend to the circulation of populations, identities, and affiliations in an age

of digital connectivity, seeking out innovative new means of documenting the diverse realities of gangs in a global context. These emergent methodologies focus on how to study the interaction between the space of place and space of flow through movement of researchers between field sites, between online and offline environments, and in bringing 'real virtuality' (Castells 2000) to ground.

Circular

Circular methodologies are premised on the notion of mobility of populations and involve the circulation of researcher or researchers between multiple fieldsites, generating real-time observations. As Kenway and Fahey (2009, p. 28) note, 'the place and movement of the researcher's body and thought' represent a central strut in the construction of knowledge, and mobile populations require mobile scholarship. Significantly, too, much gang research has emanated from the global north leading to a tendency to 'read from the centre' (Connell 2007, p. 45). Rather than seeking out like-for-like comparisons by ontologically separate researchers, therefore, this approach relies on the logic of constant comparison to generate insights that are premised on building a flexible and reflexive knowledge-base amongst a community of scholars. It builds on notions of 'multi-sited ethnography' (Marcus 1995) which sought to capture flow through 'tracking' ideas, objects, people as well as 'things, metaphors, stories, and conflicts as mobile objects of research' (Marcus 1995), using mobile methods to trace the fluid interaction-chains across disparate geographies.

   In recent years, mobility has emerged as a major motif in a number of gang studies. Gang formation in a global context has increasingly become understood through the optic of forced deportation policy and cultural connectivity, particularly pertaining to the United States and Latin America, using mobile methods to trace shifting identities across place and time (Zilberg 2011). Zilberg (2011), draws attention to the 'boomerang effect' of deportations from the US and subsequent criminalisation under US policies of zero tolerance. This twin-track process of transnational gang suppression results from an unequal tethering of the US and El Salvador 'from above and below'—involving both transnational population flow and military/police training—and has 'resulted in the deportation to El Salvador of thousands of Salvadoran immigrant gang youth' (Zilberg 2011, p. 65). Similarly, Brotherton and Barrios (2011) developed a transnational methodology that followed deportees across varying transnational fieldsites, emphasising both cultural fluidity alongside fixed sites in communities, immigration centres and prisons. In another study, Brotherton ethnographically traces the connections between the Latin Kings gang/collective in Spain, Italy the US and Ecuador (2007, p. 378). Such approaches are premised, crucially, on the circulation of populations and the corresponding need for researchers to 'follow' identities and cultural connections as they stretch around the planet.

   Most recently, the circular methodologies employed in the ERC project 'Gangs, Gangsters and Ganglands: Towards a Global Comparative Ethnography', led by Dennis Rodgers, have broken new ethnographic ground in the field of global gang studies (Jensen and Rodgers, forthcoming). The study employs a methodological approach involving the rotation of embedded fieldworkers between two field sites in the global south (Cape Town, South Africa and Managua, Nicaragua) and one in the global North (Marseilles, France) to generate 'abductive' South-South comparisons, switching the polarity of theory building in gang research.
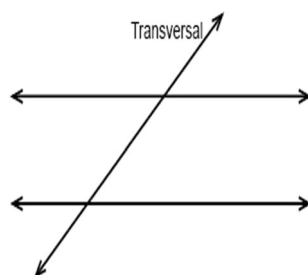
Transversal

Transversal lines of comparison are premised on efforts to analyse the fusion of global flows and local contexts. For Robertson (1995), 'glocalization' was a localizing process in which the global product remains local. Global cultural products are "received" by host communities, adapted and adopted according to local practises. More recent theorizations of the concept of glocalization, however, move beyond these global–local hybrids towards an analysis of the 'mediascape' (Appadurai 2004) that increasingly acts as a hinterland between online and offline identities. For Roudemetof (2016), the 'glocal' is defined not by hybridity and fusion but the 'refraction' of global processes through the lens of the local. In the process, a new set of cultural products emerge that are composed of a meeting between elements of the local and the global but that create something new that is neither local nor global. As such, Roudometof (2016) expands Tsing's (2005) perspective that the relationships between global and local cultures are constituted through 'friction'. Figure 2, illustrates the transversal that bisects the parallel, representing the connections that cross-cut geographically distinct field sites.

In the field of gang studies, for example, van Hellemont (2015) found in her study of Belgian gangs that the messages of alienation and resistance embedded in U.S. gangsta rap formed a crucial resource for young African migrants experiencing similar forms of marginalization in Brussels. Others have drawn attention to the fluid and contingent way that the Bloods and "Crips in Orange" have adapted the styles and cultures of U.S. street culture (Roks, 2019; van Gemert et al. 2016). Similarly, Savage and Hickey-Moody (2010) have examined the cultural norms of a group of young Australian-Sudanese men seeking to navigate experiences of marginality in the urban context of Melbourne.

This methodology can also be employed for the purposes of comparison, in line with Burawoy's 'global ethnography' of connection and imagination. A recent example can be found in a comparison of gang 'glocalisation' between Brussels and London (van Hellemont and Densley 2019), which interrogates the intersection between popular culture, music, and technology with gangs. In effect, this is a disruptive innovation on a parallel comparison, with the transversal cross-cutting in such a way that it can open up space for analytic synergy—or syzygy—in surprising contexts. This side-slice through conceptual axes responds to the media-culture-crime nexus of cultural criminology (Ferrell et al. 2008) combining the 'space of place' and 'space of flow' by bringing instances of gang glocalisation to ground.

Fig. 3 Radial lines
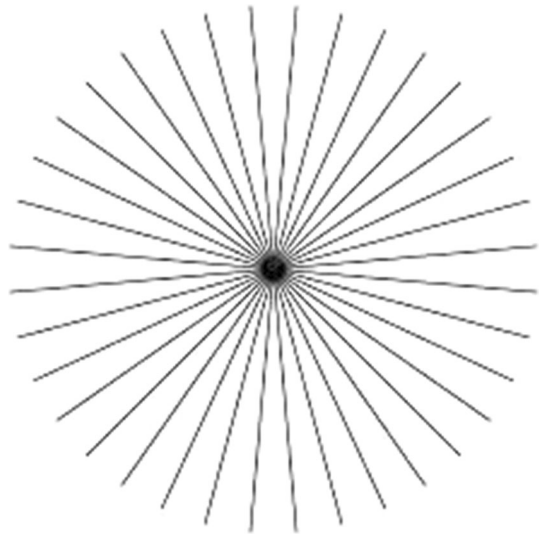
Radial

The final emergent line is one that begins in the 'space of flow', through analysis of digital interactions via social media platforms. Castells (2000, p. 203) coined the online realm as 'not a 'virtual reality', but rather as a 'real virtuality', a socio-technically generated inter-actional environment rooted in the 'real world' of political, economic, social and cultural relations. Since then, however, technological change has accelerated at an unprecedented rate, resulting in a breakdown of the boundary between digital and social lives (Caselli and Gilardoni 2018). As recent studies have demonstrated, young people do not distinguish between 'real' and 'online' worlds, necessitating methods that attend the intersections between them: 'youth-subcultural life is a continuous virtual-real experience' (Wilson 2006, p. 308). This has important implications for the study of gangs and youth street cultures more broadly. Ilan (2015), for example, discusses the phenomenon of "online repin" in which YouTube and social media become sites for one-upmanship and rivalry that can spill over into the streets. Social media can act as a 'force multiplier' (Yar 2005) that transforms street violence (Stuart 2019), but also as the catalyst for mutual aid and identity-formation for young people experiencing social isolation and exclusion (Nilan and Feixa 2006). As illustrated in Fig. 3, below, radial lines emanate from a central point, in this case from the virtual domain.

In recent years scholarship has started to emerge that are conversant in both neighbourhood-based and online modes of interaction. Lane's work on the 'digital street', for example, combines traditional ethnography with 'netnography' of young people's social media interactions to interrogate the fluidity between online identity and offline performance, and their implications for gang identities. Similarly, van Hellemont (2012, 2015) and Roks (2019) draw on composite methodologies to trace the negotiation between real and virtual domains. An important recent example of such approaches is the ERC-funded TRANSGANG project, led by Carles Feixa, which centres the interaction between global flows and local identities in the transnational 'gang' phenomenon. The study traces the dynamic interactions between globalised gang symbols and punitive policies 'from

above' as well as practises of mutual support, collectivism and virtual interaction 'from below', analysing the 'gang' as an agent of mediation. The study will draw on netnography amongst other methods to interrogate the mechanisms by which young people traverse virtual and neighbourhood contexts to build community and mediate conflict (Fernandez-Planells, Orduna-Malea and Feixa 2021).

Finally, it is notable that new methodological tools such as machine learning and 'algorithmic sampling' (van Hellemont, forthcoming) have started to emerge. For example, Patton has developed an innovative approach that uses social media to interrogate the aftermath of homicide (Patton et al 2017, 2018). Compiling thousands of social media posts, coded for a range of emotions, this approach tracks expressions of grief and anger over time to establish an early warning system of retribution. Such approaches, however, have not yet been attempted beyond single sites. Though there are in-built issues with discrimination and causality that can render 'big data' problematic (Chan and Moses 2016), and there is a need for critical discussion of the role of ethics in the 'digital street',[2] there is also potential to render the social world as it exists today more intelligible by anchoring understandings of youth and gangs within a networked cultural and digital landscape. Cultural criminologists have suggested so-called 'liquid' or 'instant' ethnographies as ways of documenting these juxtapositions, but it may be that we need to think more expansively in terms of data science, social media scraping, and algorithmic intelligence.

Conclusion: Lines of Flight

A defining feature of the twenty-first century is the emergence of new landscapes of crime, harm and security that challenge existing theoretical and methodological paradigms. Increasing global interconnectedness, the audacious growth of mobile technologies, and the movement of populations have reoriented the nature of social life, forming a new constellation of global harms that stretch the criminological imagination into uncharted territories. Societies are increasingly governed by complex networks and digital infrastructures that cross divisions between the human and non-human, creating the potential for new forms of harm that challenge academics, policy-makers and civil society groups to rethink the structures and institutions of justice. Deleuze and Guattari designate the shifts in paradigmatic thought required by such tectonic shifts as 'lines of flight', elusive moments that emerge in the intersections between large-scale social change. In this paper, we have sought several such lines—circular, transversal and radial—in an effort to approximate and bring to ground this world in motion as it applies to gangs.

Thrasher's classical approach associated gangs with urban areas with high levels of poverty, dense populations, high populations of young people, and limited space and resource but in the context of the modern global economy, it is no longer possible—if indeed it ever was—to analyse urban gangs in isolation. While twentieth-century studies were rooted in place, increasingly since the turn of the millennium researchers have become more theoretically sensitised to the consequences of time–space compression, virtual-social hybridity,

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[2] Urbanik, Roks, Densley and Storrod (2020) provide an overview of the methodological and ethical challenges they encountered during fieldwork in navigating between the digital and 'terrestrial' world and conclude that future methodologies should 'be able to grasp the realities of street life not just on the physical or digital streets, but simultaneously on the ground, in the feeds, and in the networks (Urbanik, Roks et al. 2020).'.

and transmediation in the constitution of gang identities around the world. In this paper, we have sought to recentre the study of gangs from the 'space of place' to the 'space of flow'. This is not to discount the significance of definitional clarity, historical change or cultural differentiation, but to recast these issues in a way that is attuned to the social, cultural and technological flows that constitute gang realities in the twenty-first century. This demands, of necessity, the prising open of definitional categories such as 'gang' to recognize their flexibility and contingency—constituting the 'gang' identity as one that is constituted in and through overlapping the domains of media, politics, technology and neighbourhood life.

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