

SCENES

Terry Nichols Clark & Daniel Aaron Silver

What is “Scenes”?

In postindustrial, knowledge-driven societies, where symbols replace widgets, we need new concepts about consumption and lifestyle, in addition to work. Scenes are one such concept. Scenes build on aesthetics, which we incorporate with social science concepts and methods. People’s aesthetics inform their consumption, and define 15 scenes dimensions, like localism, egalitarianism, self-expression, and transgression. We study scenes as geographic units, with physical facilities, and people as consumer/participants in activities like concerts. We measure scenes with amenities like churches and museums from census-es, electronic yellow pages, and citizen surveys. These combine in 15 scenes dimensions for some 40,000 US zipcodes, and local units studied with collaborators in Canada, Spain, France, Korea, Japan, China, Poland, and Germany.

A Grammar of Scenes

Before these raw data can be meaningful, however, we need to develop some conceptual tools for distilling the character of the scene from them. By breaking the cultural experience into 15 dimensions, we are able to quantify and compare between different scenes. Each dimension then can be scored and a numerical representation of the scene can be gathered

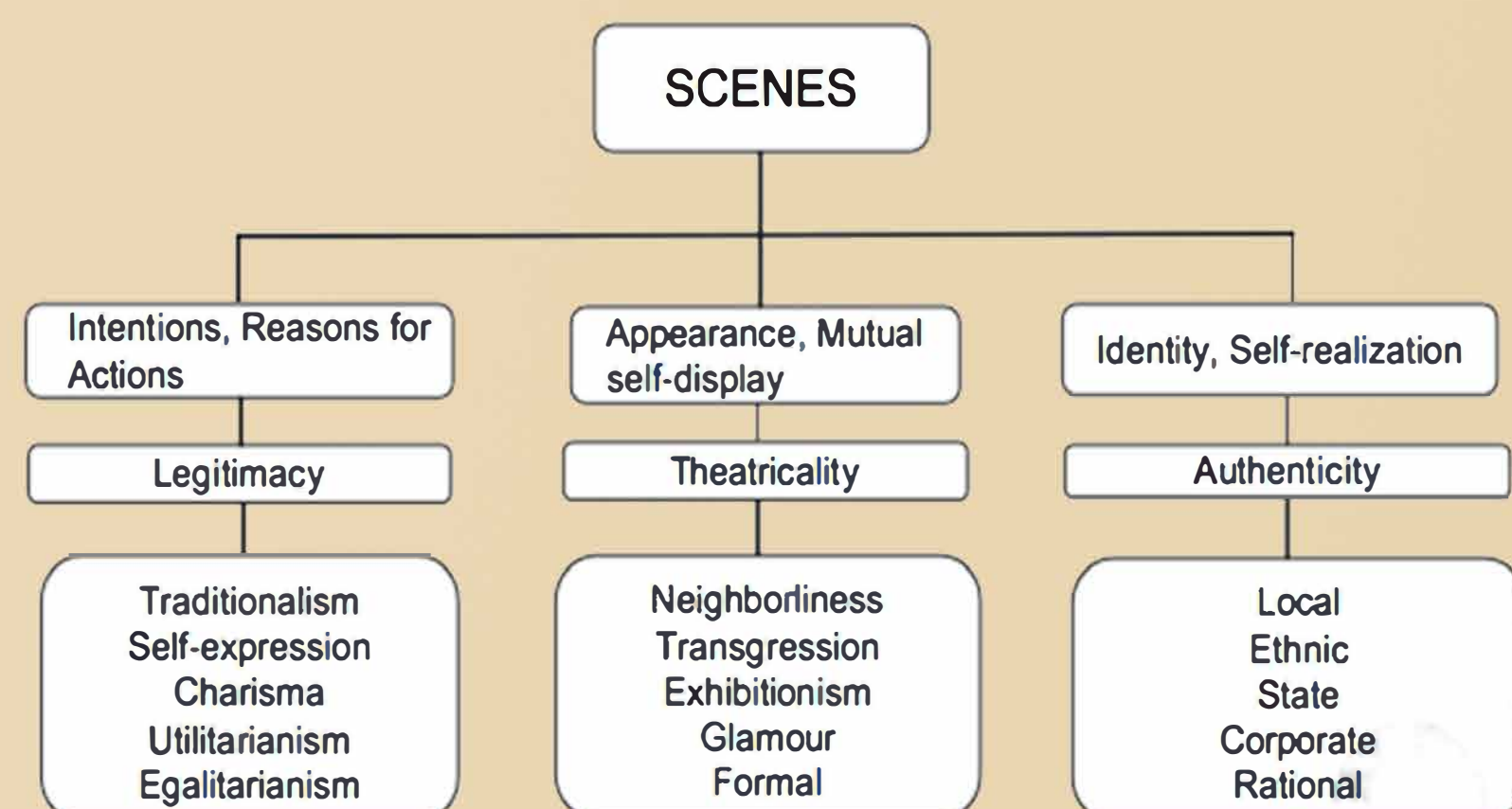


Fig. 2. A Grammar of Scenes: 15 Dimensions.

joining complex scenes and scenes dimensions

Because the same dimensions of meaning can be present across scenes, their qualities can (and must) be abstracted from any specific scene. Each quality – local authenticity, transgression, tradition, glamour, formality – has its own character that can be articulated separately. This also implies that no single abstract quality defines any particular scene. Different combinations of dimension scores create different scenes. E.g. if both ethnic neighborhood and neo-bohemian scenes have a dimension of local authenticity, this does not make them the same. The difference lies in how this one quality combines with others in each particular configuration – one with self-expression and transgression, the other with neighborliness and tradition. However these combinations emerged, the resulting scene is a specific combination of multiple traits.

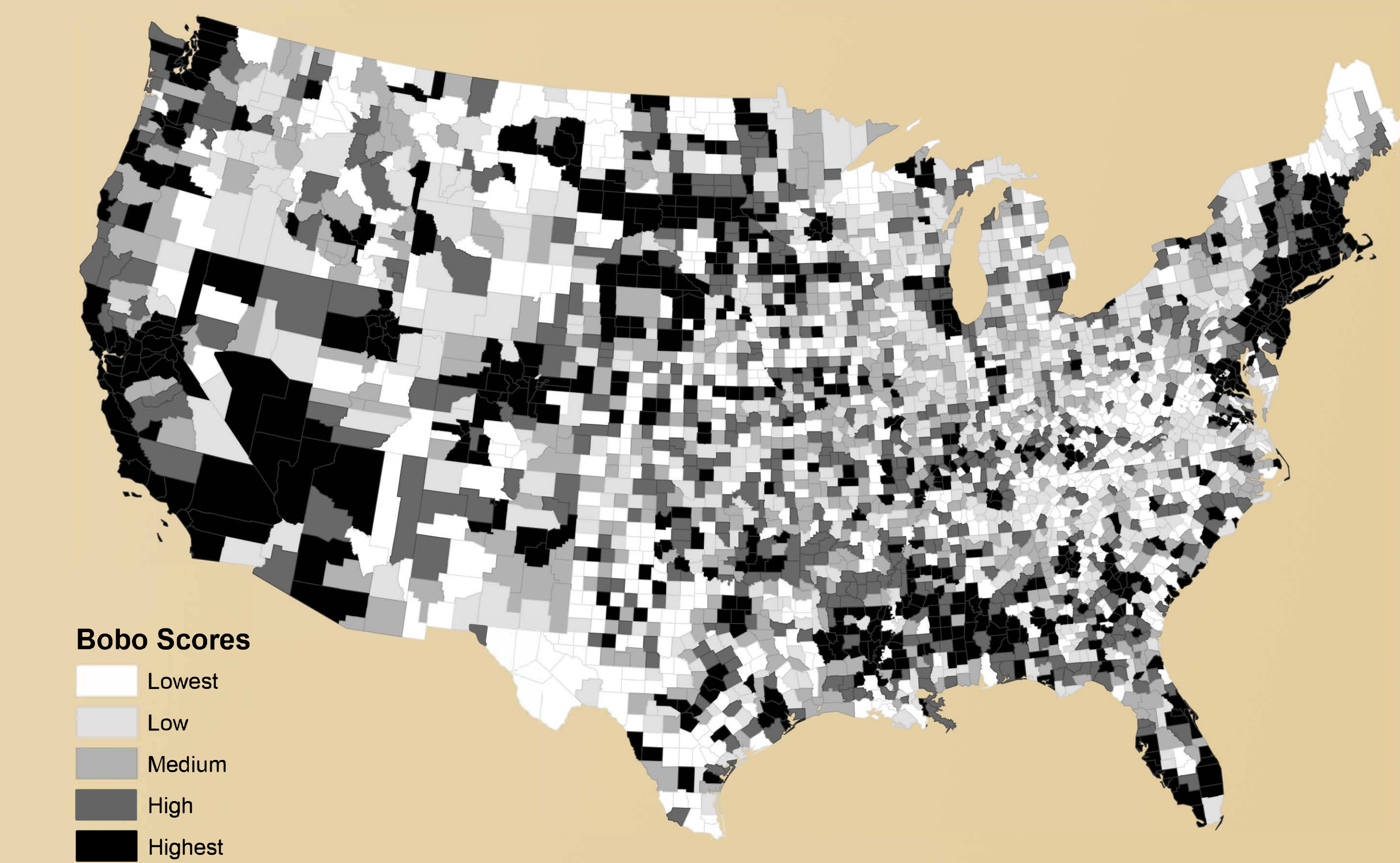
Table 4: Joining complex scenes and scenes dimensions

	Denver	Heaven	Bohemian	Samurai's Licensed Quarters	Remix's Lodge	L.A.A Land Tunnel	Rosin's Tour	Wagner's Volk	Brook's Bobo's	Good Cosmopolitanism	Purity	NASCAR Country
Traditionalist	4	2	3	3	2	2	4	4	4	2	4	5
Self-Expressive	2	5	3	4	4	5	2	4	3	4	4	2
Utilitarian	4	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	4	4
Charismatic	3	4	3	4	5	5	3	3	4	4	4	4
Egalitarian	2	2	3	2	3	3	4	4	3	5	4	2
Formal	3	2	2	5	4	3	3	2	4	2	4	4
Neighborhood	4	2	1	3	2	3	4	3	4	2	4	5
Glamorous	2	3	3	4	5	5	3	4	4	3	4	1
Exhibitionist	1	3	4	4	5	3	3	3	3	3	4	3
Transgressive	1	5	5	2	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	2
Local	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	2	4	5
Ethnic	2	3	3	3	3	3	5	4	5	4	4	3
State	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	4	5
Corporate	4	1	3	3	3	2	2	2	3	2	4	4
Rational	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	4	3

This matrix displays the 15 scenes dimensions as rows and the complex scenes as the Denver Heaven as columns. The cell entries are weights, with 5 most positive. Denver Heaven is thus defined by the 15 weighted scores in the column below it: somewhat Traditional but clearly not Transgressive. The matrix more generally illustrates the combinatorial logic of joining and weighting the 15 scenes dimensions to create many other complex scenes.

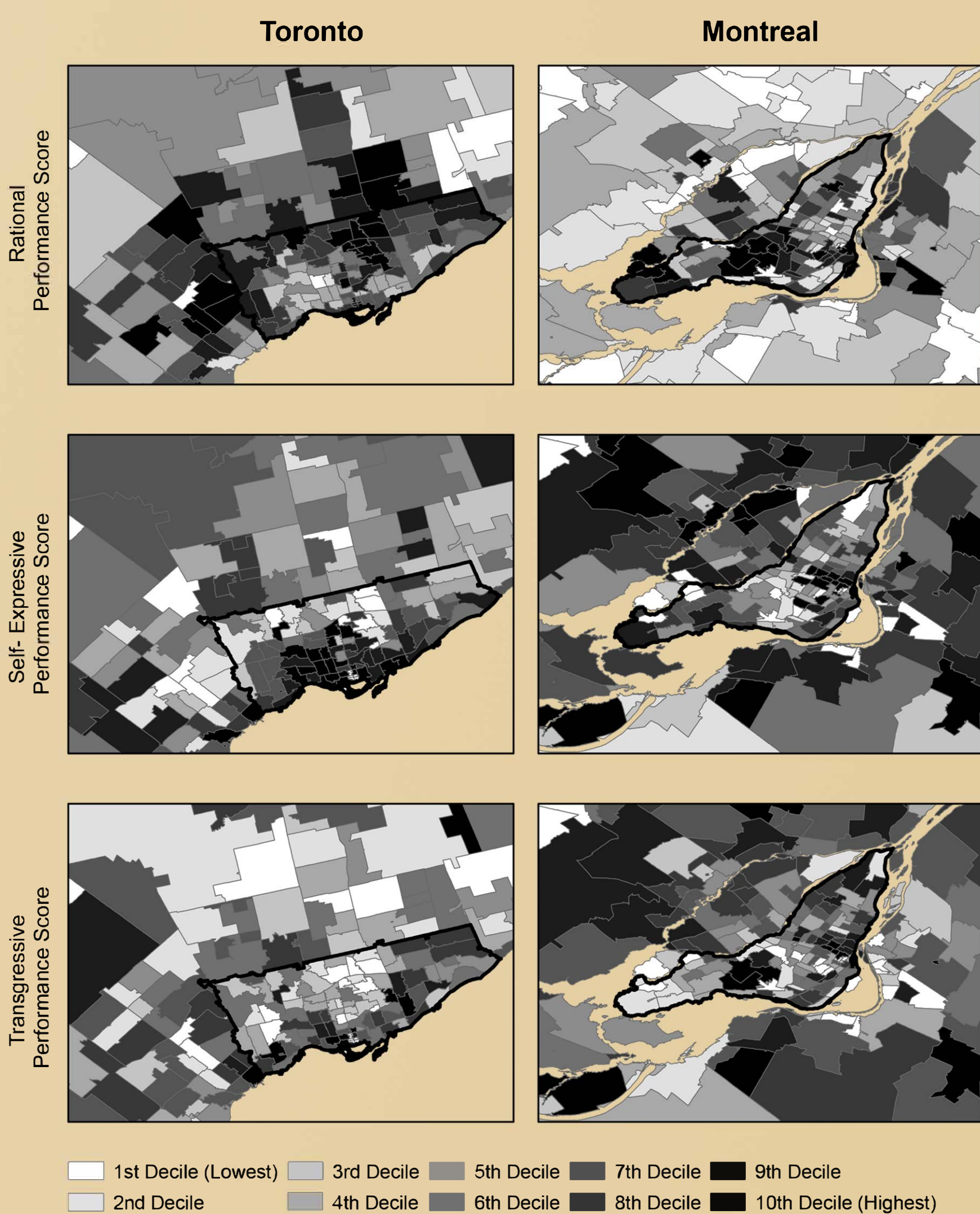
Brooks’ Bobos

Bohemian values and Bourgeois budgets combine in David Brook’s Bobos in Paradise amalgam (Brooks, 2000), quintessentially illustrated by towns like Burlington, VT where latte spots offer expensive coffee, poetry, and anti-establishment politics, which attract bearded professors with worn knapsacks riding old bikes. Richard Florida draws heavily on Brooks, arguing that the style has generalized nationally, and makes some cities take off and be creative, attracting new and talented residents who bring their bohemian sensibilities to their work, as in the case of Steve Jobs, who told the Pentagon in a security clearance application that LSD was a “positive life-changing experience” and that hashish and marijuana made him “relaxed and creative.” Woodstock plus Wall Street equals Silicon Valley is the Bobo formula.



Bobo Scores

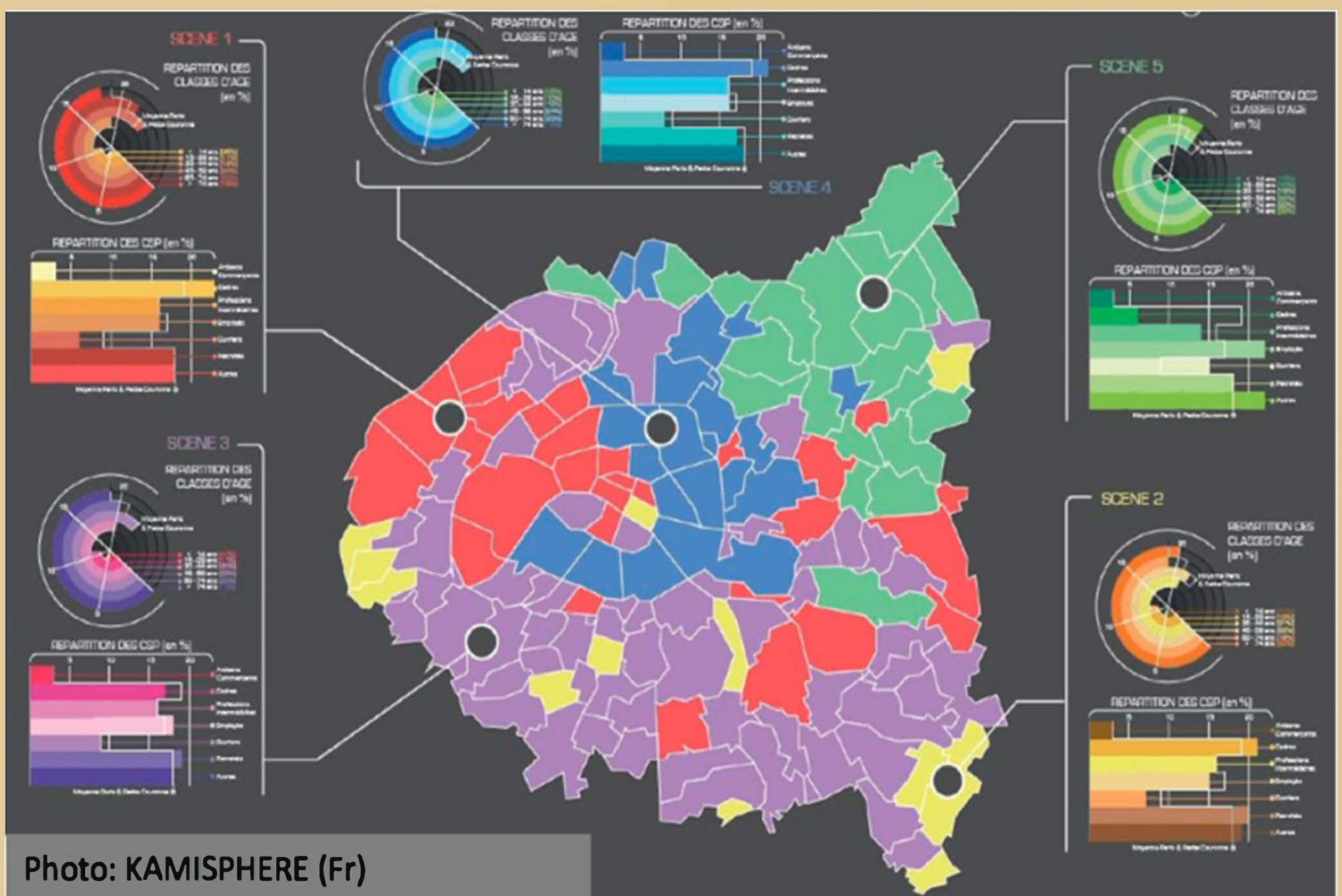
Lowest
Low
Medium
High
Highest



Rationalism, Self-Expression, and Transgression in Montreal and Toronto

Here we can see alternative versions of anti-traditional scenes. Fitting with classic depictions of major cities as disruptive of traditional customs and beliefs, Toronto and Montreal are light across most postal districts, and their average tradition scores are well below the national mean. Yet there are many ways to reject tradition, and these are deeply embedded in these cities’ scenes. Rationalism makes the scene in the cities’ downtown cores and in some suburban areas, but other parts of each city have strongly anti-rationalist scenes. These are often defined by self-expression, which is concentrated in Montreal’s famous Plateau area and in Toronto in the neighbourhoods surrounding the downtown core (such as the Annex, The Entertainment District, and Queen West, in the West and Leslieville and the Beaches in the East). If we add transgressive theatricality to the mix, we can also see the aesthetic distinction between the more counter-cultural West End scenes in Toronto and the more local and neighbourly East.

This shows an analysis of the clustering of 15 different types of scenes for Paris, details are in our volume on Cartography of Paris.



The sciences project has published seven monographs and many papers. For more see:

Terry Nichols Clark
Professor of Sociology
University of Chicago
1126 E. 59th St. #322
Chicago, IL 60637

tel 312 842 5169
fax 312 842 0185
tnclark@uchicago.edu
On Scenes:
<http://www.tnc-newsletter.blogspot.com/> AND
scenes.uchicago.edu

