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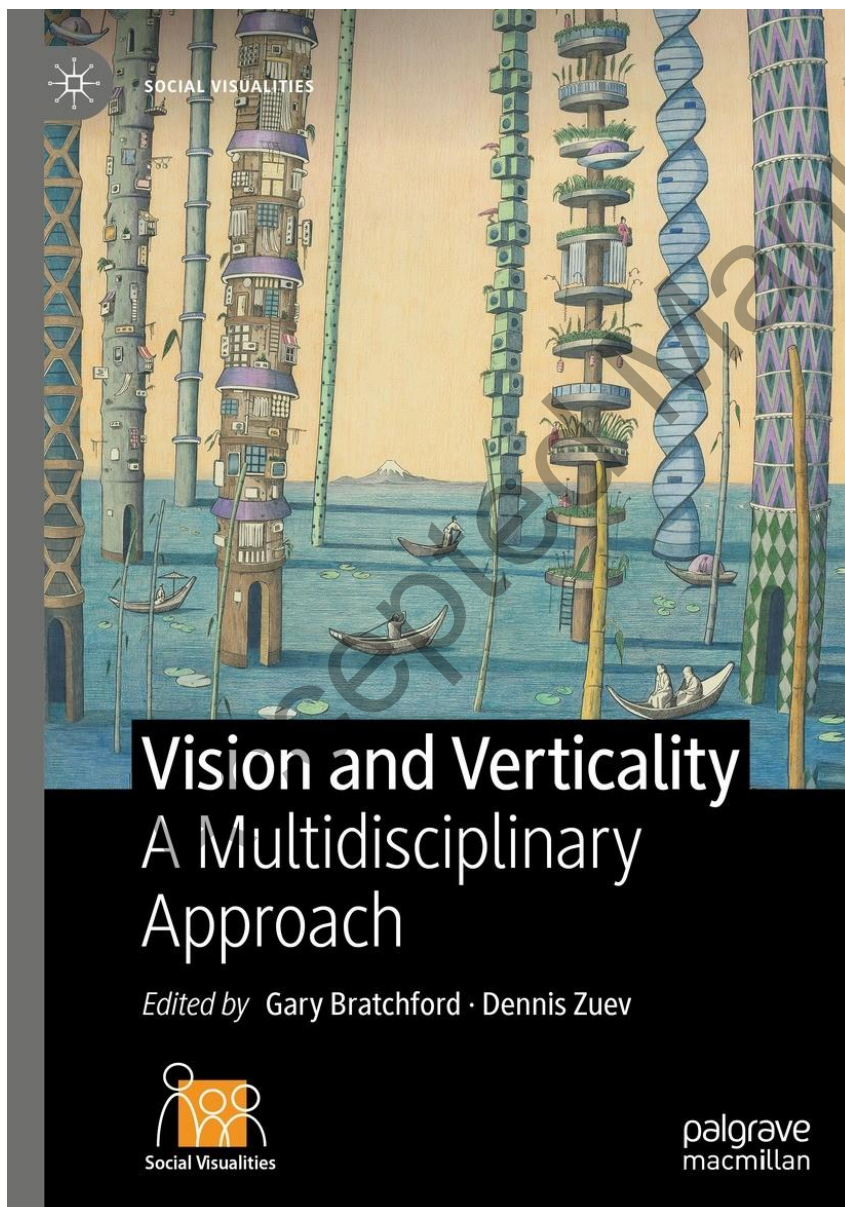
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Vision and Verticality: A Multidisciplinary Approach, Gary Bratchford and Dennis Zuev, Eds.

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Review by Elvin Wyly

In our present age of algorithmic, combinatoric capitalization of distinct cognitive commodities – each coded to a unique DOI with its own ORCID —the future of books (and book reviews) is uncertain. *Vision and Verticality* is much more than the sum of its parts. If only reading a few chapters—perhaps separately as first published in a special issue of *Visual Studies Journal*—wonderful insights are available. However, an entirely different view appears in a careful read of the entire assemblage as a book in an era of post-book quasi-literacy (Baron, 2015). This is where you can apprehend the overwhelming, multidimensional perceptual galaxy of our current moment. Bratchford and Zuev convene a pluralistic conversation to build a transdisciplinary social theory of the visual and the vertical; their opening chapter contextualizes a “visual sociology that now encompasses a focus on the assemblage of relations and networks that bring image and vision into being” (p. 1), while quickly drawing the reader’s attention to the analytical and authorial diversity of the collection. The “Notes on Contributors” is itself a joyous subversion of the taxonomic conceit of tidy divisions of cognitive labor. A partial list of contributors’ professions includes architect, photographer, artist, anthropologist, historian, philosopher, data scientist, astronaut, SCUBA diver, actress, dancer, designer, geographer, journalist, and sociologist. Such inclusivity has remarkable implications for today’s fast-evolving

relations of space, time, and verticality. Imagine if Robert Ezra Park had cheap drones and DIY satellite image receivers when he fused Comte's post-theological positivism with neo-Kantian idealism and Dewey's pragmatism to create the "cognitive Darwinism" of the 1920s Chicago School of Sociology. Read properly, this beautiful collection reveals oscillating multidimensional frontiers of personal and planetary noumena/phenomena dialectics that have been accelerating since the 19th century industrialization of knowledge production amidst the engineered ontologies of visual positivism (photography) and visual-vertical colonial cognition (cartography).

Thirty years ago, J.B. Jackson (1994), legendary Editor of the journal *Landscape*, observed that anyone alive at that moment was part of the first generation to become accustomed to seeing the Earth from the air. *Vision and Verticality* explores the paradoxes of these kinds of intergenerational, epistemological ruptures. Human experience and perception in and of a thin, horizontal planetary biosphere is being stretched, extended, punctured, torn, and simulated in the accelerating co-evolution of tall, dense urban environments, advancing aerial and orbital surveillance systems, and exabytes of digitized and visual data. This collection includes seventeen chapters—a not coincidental correlation, perhaps, with Harvey's (2017) *Seventeen Contradictions*—organized into four sections. The first set of contributions considers experimental approaches to verticality and the visualization of volumetric spaces. A second set explores technological politics of perception from above via aerial surveillance, satellite remote sensing, and drones. Part three showcases artistic perspectives on vertigo in real and imagined spaces. Essays in the fourth section reanimate the tradition of cultural landscape interpretation to highlight changing places and power relations of vertical vision.

Every chapter transcends unfortunate legacies of forty years of poststructuralist critical theory—the linear, almost mechanical equation of vertical vision with an irredeemably evil, God’s eye positivist epistemological violence. The authors herein are not simply critical of the visual-vertical, but critical *with* visual-vertical perspectives synthesized with agile, adaptive, multidimensional methods. The authors take us *everywhere* in space-time, from real landscapes and atmospheres to cognitive disciplinary topographies. Analyses venture into the sharp material realities of really-existing skyscraper landscapes and drone surveillance practices, as well as virtual worlds of artistic representation, real-estate marketing, and neo-positivist algorithmic architecture refracting future productions of space. Appropriately seductive images are gracefully integrated in narrative palimpsests of past and present, local and global. Many valuable themes recur among the diverse contributions. One particularly significant issue, however, integrates and strengthens the entire collection: the matter of scale. Geographical scale is traditionally misunderstood as naturalized, *a priori* nested hierarchy – individual → household → neighborhood → city → region → nation → continent → world. In reality, scale is constantly destabilized and reproduced through social, political, and technological practice. *Vision and Verticality* includes vivid interplays between, for example, Artem Yaklovlev and Dennis Zuev’s examination of Instagram touristification of Soviet memory in the steep slopes of *dacha* landscapes in Siberia, and Lewis Bush’s analysis of John F. Kennedy’s space-race frontier manifesto and Google Earth as software updates for nineteenth-century colonial Social Darwinism. Intensified socio-spatial hierarchies of neoliberalism are illuminated in Ana Aragão’s stunning drawings of u/dystopian imaginary skyscrapers, and David Kendall’s analysis of the fusion of speculative capital with architectural imagination in Dubai mega-project blueprints. In distinct yet complementary ways, the simultaneously personalized and planetary

rescaling of vertical surveillance is highlighted in Francisco Klauser's analysis of police drones, Ole B. Jensen and Paul Cureton's diagnosis of drone-driven transformations of landscape architecture, and Anthony Downey's engagement with Shona Illingworth's art on algorithmic war and cybernetic, non-binary recoding of death and life. And we can perceive dynamic new scales of embodied human cognition and vision beyond the planet in the "collective Earth images" of open-source satellite receivers in Sasha Engelmann and Sophie Dyer's *Open Weather Feminist Handbook* – juxtaposed with reflections on zero-gravity environments and seeing Earth from space in conversations between the sociologist Julie Patarin-Jossec, the dancer and diver Jeanne Morel, and the NASA/European Space Agency astronaut Jean-François Clervoy.

It's a wild ride. Buy this book— or pull an Abbie Hoffman (1971)—but, most importantly, read it. *Vision and Verticality: A Multidisciplinary Approach* offers the most comprehensive guide to visualizing the new gravitational forces of capital, code, and cognition in the noöspheric neropolis that co-evolves in and beyond a precarious planet.

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Bio

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