

To what extent is 'difference' revealed through the meaning and symbolism of urban landscapes

The metropolis reproduces a distinct space for humans to live out their 'urban cultures of difference.' It is a place of intensified proximity, a site wherein the native body 'collides and confronts its Other' (Barthes, 1990). Yet it is these collisional and fractious relations that create the city space; indeed Massey, distilling such a dialectic, writes: 'space and multiplicity are co-constitutive: without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space.' Cultural and symbolic difference embedded within the city space are thus manifested in the fleshy corporealities of the native and the Other. Primarily, this paper suggests that the gendered and ethnicised socio-spatial boundaries of New York, Sao Paulo and Bradford are constructed along such corporeal axes of difference. Furthermore I postulate that these differences, once institutionalised and instrumentalised, serve in the reproduction of hegemonic urban discourses and 'strategic essentialisms' that are strictly dualistic in articulating the 'homo-hetero', 'black-white', 'pure-dirty', 'us-Other' tropes.

This paper however argues that the hegemony is never fully realised within urban, public space; that, where bodies 'inflected by *alternative* material practices, representations and structures' are politically articulate, such ideals of homogeneity are readily dissolvable. Moreover, I explore how these subversions diffuse public images and symbols of urban difference most coherently, and thus to a large extent, act in antagonism to the hegemony by revealing urban landscapes as intensely differential. Finally, this paper acknowledges the precarity of these 'cultures of difference' and their increasing emergence within the postmodern, post-Fordist, consumer imaginaries. However rather than placing difference wholly in ethnic and gendered animosities I suggest a more romantic urbanism, one wherein the city - with its overbearing rhythms and unscripted encounters - can too engender hybridity, intimacy and fellowship throughout the familiarities of time.

The symbiotic relations between corporeality and urbanity emerge, as Kristeva suggests, as the 'residues of infantile experience'. (Valentine, 2000) She posits that the sense of us and Other entrenched within the cultural landscape of the city originates in childhood, wherein the child 'develops a sense of itself as a single bounded identity as a result of its gradual recognition that it has a separate body from that of its mother.' Such experience is however strung between the antagonisms of aversion and desire, repulsion and attraction. This instability, coalescing with the subject's further 'sense of repulsion at its own bodily residues', necessitates the displacement of contradictory feelings onto an externalised Other and the imposition of boundaries, both bodily and spatial between. Sibley finds cogency of such object relationism within the Western metropolis, suggesting that the political organisation of space, social values and power relations' are vernaculars of similarly infantile residues. As such particular groups - gypsies, ethnic minorities and homosexuals - are constructed as 'dirty' and polluting abject others that must be externalised through exclusionary social and spatial measures.

Sao Paulo, as Caldeira writes, is one such 'city of walls', wherein its inhabitants live 'separate worlds' apart yet in parallel trajectories deathward. Enclaves of affluence, sprouting within closed, secure condominiums serve to reproduce a dualistic narrative of purity and impurity between the rich segregator and the favelah-dwelling segregated. Such creation of distinct landscapes of urban difference is however pure corollary to a 19th Century Britain, in which the

white middle classes, increasingly fearful of the disorder and tumult of the City, had once too retreated towards suburbia to establish ethnically homogenous and stable enclaves. The smothering of difference and imposition of a single-minded space, as Valentine elicits, extends inward, towards the city centre itself. One such US phenomenon is the growth in privately owned commercial spaces, such as malls, that effectively undermine the democratic function of the street. Furthermore Valentine reveals an almost Orwellian private security industry imposing a 'normative space-time ecology' on the city by defining who 'belongs' where and what is 'appropriate behaviour.

The metropolis, according to Massey, is a 'thick space', one in which the multiple, actual embodied encounters of its inhabitants occur with 'frenetic yet rhythmic temporalities and palimpsestic spatial consistencies.' The latter trope, that of the city, and the individual's experience of it, having 'spatial consistencies' is cardinal in revealing the segregated and 'Othering' logic of the city. Indeed, Lefebvre, writing in the early 20th Century, would regard the production of urban space and the 'metropolitan' ideologue in London, Paris and Vienna as the physical manifestations of an imagined bourgeoisie geography. Anderson, in a study of Vancouver and the cultural hegemony of an ethnic enclave, Chinatown, suggests that space continues to be constructed instrumentally through a dominant discourse of 'Othering'. He writes: 'Chinatown was the glint of the Orient in an Occidental setting...its streets were speedily adapted to match this representation.' Furthermore, such artificial, superimposed politics of difference were occurring long into the post war liberal administrations. The 'Chinese race' as such became institutionalised and its occupying space imbued with a static, racial and ghettoized identity. Such 'spatial consistencies' of dominance and inferiority are legitimated by regulatory frameworks, or, as Jackson postulates, the hyper-criminalisation and incarceration regimes of the US.

The body as such can never be understood as a pure, neutral or pre-social form onto which social meanings are projected. It is always a social and discursive object (Grosz, 1993a, cited in Valentine). They are as Foucault would write, 'dociled' into self-disciplining and reproducing the dominant discourse; behaving in an 'imperfect panopticism.' Hubbert further suggests that prostitutes are both socially and spatially marginalised by the State and the law in such a way as to 'maintain and legitimise the moral values of heterosexuality and white masculinity. Spatial distance as such - between the moral suburban heterosexual male and the enclosed red-light district prostitutes - serves to maintain physical and discursive boundaries between their supposedly differing moral and immoral bodily sexualities. The material presence of police patrols are too, not dissociated with the emotions of exclusion, indeed these regimes are affective. Such was the case of Rodney King in which the institutionalised 'Othering' of the black body as criminal and carceral was rendered visibly authentic in his white attackers' acquittal. In similar vein, Davis places the southern California residential curfews 'deployed selectively against black and Chicano youth' within both the material and affective sensibilities of white male heterosexual dominancies.

The visual and symbolic manifestations of difference within the urban landscape are thus both material - in the form of segregated ethnic and economic boundaries - and immaterial - performed amidst the everyday lives of individuals. Seamon suggests the habitual movements of urbanites, their individual 'time-space routines' fuse to create the 'place ballets' that constitute our orientation and sense of place. Places of difference are constituted by these 'ballets', places

as such become 'imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understanding.' (Massey, 1993 cited in Panelli) Furthermore, the organisation of the metropolis through regulatory structures materialises out of the affective and embodied experiences of its individual bodies. The city space as such is dually an externalised and internalised construct, the corporeal body imprinted on to the city and vice versa. Graaff, exploring the popular black genre of street literature in New York suggests that these authors of ethnic minority have internalised the city. Graaff posits the existence of a 'street-prison symbiosis' within the social and symbolic structure of the metropolis, such that the protagonists, both literary and real, become evidence of the interpenetration and interdependency between 'a more dislocated, fragmented, and abandoned space' of 'the streets' and the regimented state space of the prison.

These embodied and performative space-identity politics are, as Graaff concludes: a 'response to urban segregation processes in 21st Century America,' the corporeal reflex as such to the very real economic and racial differences of the city. This process is however not confined to the single nation-state. 'Othering', as Edward Said would write, has defined the subjective relations and internalised between the Occident and the Orient for centuries. The cities of the global South are symbolically constructed as underdeveloped mega-cities 'bursting at the seams, overtaken by their own fate of poverty, disease, violence, and toxicity.' Indeed Davis' representation is one of a 'planet of slums', with its 'surplus humanity' and twilight struggles' (Davis, 2004 p.13) Yet, these construed meanings and symbols are deeply embedded in Anglo-American imaginary geographies, within a system, as Harvey writes, of 'asymmetrical ignorance.' These long-established urban theories, by externally constructing cities of the global South as anomalous, different and esoteric empirical examples have gradually become internalised, to produce a neo-orientalist discourse of a Third World, heart of darkness, irretrievable Other.

The material, visual and symbolic manifestations of difference within the urban landscape are constituted by dynamic and performative bodies. Thus, whilst the visually identifiable binary between the us and other, Occident and Orient, rich and poor appears to be starkly revealed in the streets of Harlem or Whitechapel, this gaze is also problematic and simplified social construct. Indeed, Butler writes of the deceiving masculine-feminine binary, suggesting that, rather than gender being pre-social and essential, it is more so a performative creation: 'the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory framework that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (Butler, 1993 cited in Valentine) These performative gestures of urban difference have penetrated the post-colonial English suburbs, becoming the currency of racialised identity politics. As Swanton writes: 'in a cosmopolitan world of fleshy multicultural encounters, beards, bodies, turbans, veils, urban territories, curry, or corner shops become the rubric through which difference is assembled and the grammar through which race is made legible (Swanton, 2008). In essence, the Bradford race riots of 2001 were corollary to such difference; the emotional collisions forged through historical 'structures of feeling' that configured suburbia or the corner shop as a once pure space now polluted by foreign, performing bodies.

As Nayak posits, once the arbitrary, symbolic signs of the quotidian - the crew cut, the football, cars on drives, whiteness - became contested by a religious and ethnic 'Other', the corporeal reflex entails nostalgia, and the inscribing of 'certain spaces through a monochrome geography of race that marks minorities as 'bodies out of place' within the

English, white idyll. In the post-9/11 city, these affective and distant yearnings of the past solidify and materialise within the everyday events and ‘encounters with [the Arab] stranger’ (Massey, 2000). That socio-economic change and political uprooting precipitate a politics of fragmentation and essentialism is further evidenced in the St Patrick’s Day Parade of New York. Rather than as a celebration of communal Irish national identity in North America, Marston posits the existence of ritualistic constructions of difference and boundaries *within* and between the sexualities of its paraders. The political deviation from the hegemonic, heterosexual norm by a lesbian and gay Irish contingent precipitated similar sentiments of nostalgia, in which the memories of religiosity and the ‘highly gendered constructions of the hyper-masculinised and hyper-feminised’ resurfaced. The very real and tangible symbols of sexual and ethnic difference within the metropolis are thus often rendered most visual in times of political subversion and performance as it were, within the place ballet of an ‘Otherness.’

The reproduction of urban space through subversive and alternate performativities engender most acutely ‘cultures of difference.’ As Marston’s ethnography of New York on St Patrick’s Day reveals, difference, and moreover the consciousness of that difference, arises when bodies with alternative sexual and ethnic affinities subvert the hegemonic norm. The parodic repetition and mimicry of sexual identities within drag balls, for example, instills dissonance, requiring our acknowledgement of difference and the fictitious relations between signifier and signified. As Johnson writes, such ‘Mardi Gras’ as both transgressive and ephemeral ‘spectacular celebrations of dissident sexualities’ serve to radically appropriate ‘public space’ and ‘expose its normative coding as heterosexual’ (Johnson, 1997) In similar vein Notting Hill Carnival, as an expression of ethnic resistance and freedom of the street, suspends the dominant cultural order in creating a space ‘beyond the reach of racism’ (Gilroy, 1987). Urban space as such is embedded within the corporealities and affects of its inhabitants; the street coming to symbolise a democratic space of articulation. Such political and spatial subversions - a spilling out onto the streets populated by banners and voices, jerk chicken and reggae - flit feet to a wholly novel ‘place ballet’, one of a dance with difference.

The urban landscape thus emerges as a space ‘where people can enter into the experiences and interests of unfamiliar lives...to develop a richer, more complex sense of themselves.’ (Sennet, 2001) The creation of hybrid cultures as Nava suggests, is currently producing the London metropolis anew; ‘the outcomes of diasporic cultural mixing and indeterminacy’ creating post-multicultural, lived transformations within the domestic. Dwyer, writing of young, female British Muslim identity posits that ‘dress [increasingly] functions as a contested signifier of identity’, strung between the traditions of Islamic and western cultures. Such hybrid, performative spaces promote ‘moments of cultural destabilisation’; transcendence as such out of the turgid politics of ‘Othering’ and into the abandon of the city and its vast, unexpected encounters. The signifiers of difference within the metropolis are thus chameleonic, embedded amorphously within the corporealities of its creators.

The metropolis reproduces a distinct space for humans to live out their ‘urban cultures of difference.’ These cultural and symbolic differences within the city originate within the performative and affective corporealities of its dwellers. Indeed, the metropolis from its very conception in Imperial Europe, was a man-made creation and thus continues to be so. The city is thus a chameleon of sorts, both figuratively as site of economic oppression and liberation, and

discursively, as site of 'Othering' and bridging. Strung between these hegemonies and resistances I suggest that the 'difference' of the metropolis is to remain. Reiterating Massey, the city space in its very primacy relies upon the multiplicity and difference of its dwellers: 'without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. Thus, whilst hybrid cultures may seemingly signify the dissolution of symbolic difference, they are in actuality one of many nascent and multiple creations that in fact constitute and reproduce the metropolis. As Derrida would once writes, 'chaos is at once a risk and a chance.' As such it is the chaos in urban space, and our negotiation of it, amidst passing bodies and neon lights, that produce and reproduce a spatial politics of difference.

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