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WORKSHOP

‘URBAN PUBLIC SPACE IN THE CONTEXT OF MOBILITY AND AESTHETICIZATION: FACING CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES’

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Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University,
Mohrenstraße 41, 10117 Berlin
ROOM 211

ABSTRACTS

SECTION 1: MOBILITY

Chairman: Dr. **Craig Young** (MMU, Manchester)

Victor Vakhshayn, Moscow High School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

“Public place as metacommunicative message. Frame analysis of “Okhotny riad” shopping center”.

Any sociological research of urban public space involves a certain conceptualization of “place”. Often such a conceptualization has an implicit character (e.g. Goffman, 1963). In these cases sociologists borrow intuition of public place (for example, “place as a scene or arena of observable interactions”) from the province of commonsensical knowledge (Schutz, 1990). However even in these cases we are not saved from the necessity to find clear definition of *social logic* that places in question possess.

«Heterotopology of Moscow: frames, flows and sights of marginalization» research project (2007-2009) was focused on analyzing the social logics of urban places. Particularly «Okhotny riad» shopping center was chosen as an object for analysis. During two years researchers were collecting materials of *situated interactions*. Our main question was: how “the place” emerges as an interconnection of different social logics (logic of architects, logic of managers, and logic of flaneurs). How this place gets its obviousness, distinctness and readability? E. Goffman's frame analysis conception (Goffman, 1974) and J. Law's social topology (Law, 2004) were used as theoretical optics.

Results of the research returned us to the fundamental question of the public places *rationality*. There is an opposition between “formal rationality” (Gephart, 2006; Yanow, 2008) and “practical rationality” (de Serto, 1990; Watson, 2005). In the former the place is seen as a kind of text, representation, idea in the flesh, embodied in the space while in the latter place is understood as something that exists only in the flow of everyday practices, that are routine, non-reflexive and tight-fitting to each other. Sociological conceptualizations of place can be ordered on a continuum between “place as a site” (reinforcing the metaphor, we can say “...as a website”) and “place as a locale”. This continuum is supported by a number of binary oppositions within sociological theory: «gaze – body», «meaning – sense», «symbolic – material», etc.

However every concrete observable place is composed of heterogeneous elements and logics. Everyday urbanity is not reducible to representations or practices alone. In our brief talk we'll try to revise this opposition, analyzing frames of interaction observed in the "Okhotny riad".

Giulio Mattioli, University of Milan – Bicocca, Milan, Italy

"Sharing space with strangers in moving public places: social mixing and secessionism in mobility"

The increasing importance of mobility and flows is indeed shaping the transformations of urban public space: however, urban researchers have somewhat neglected the significance of "moving" public spaces themselves, such as those of public transport. This paper challenges this underestimation by arguing that social mixing and social avoidance occur not only in neighborhoods, but also in the flows of urban and suburban mobility. Using a public mode of transport entails in fact the inevitability of interaction – albeit minimum – with fellow travelers: many passengers seem to value this, and like to indulge in activities such as observing other passengers or listening to their chatting. Others may instead look for shelter in the semiprivate space of the car, which allows them to avoid unwanted co-presence with strangers (perhaps of other ethnic groups or classes). This paper argues that the continuum between these two extremes can be conceived as an attitude dimension opposing social mixing and secessionism in mobility (i.e. the varying propensity of individuals to share space with strangers during travel) and proposes its measurement through a Likert scale. In doing that, the article strongly points out the need to focus on the many ways in which the public spaces of mobility can be lived and appropriated by the travelers, and consequently on the potentialities for regeneration of public space in non car-dependent cities. A theoretical section, aimed at defining the construct clearly on the basis of existing literature on travel behavior, is presented. There follows a methodological part, focused on the necessary steps of scale development – an issue often overlooked. Finally, the results of a little used pre-testing procedure (respondent debriefing), carried out in the Milan area in 2009, are presented: interestingly, they seem to suggest the bi-dimensionality of the construct.

Rebio Diaz, The Graduate Center, The City University of New York, USA

"Mobile literacies: Reading Public Space in Spanish Harlem"

Mobility has become a key theme in the social sciences, where a mobility turn has been identified in various disciplines, promoting a shift of focus "from roots to routes", from what stays in place to what moves and circulates. Environmental psychology deals with the ways in which the urban environment is lived and experienced, and therefore has a stake in the study of how mobility shapes the environment and its perception. From this perspective, I focus on the structuring role of publicly displayed written text, arguing that text is not only a critical source of information for mobile subjects about mobile things in the urban context, but also an active *agent* of mobility, both channeling movement and opening up the immediate environment to various scales of mobility.

I use examples from my research in Spanish Harlem, NYC, to show how in a global city context, written text becomes explicitly *about* mobility and public space. Text posted in Spanish becomes a marker of 'culture', but also a site of branding and aestheticization, exposing the complex cultural dynamics of gentrification at play in traditionally underserved 'ethnic' neighborhoods. Past the 'city-as-text' metaphor, frequently used in social theory, the variety of texts and literacy practices that circulate in the urban environment (including those supported by digital technology) become a key medium of mobility and public exchange, shaping emerging socio-spatial dynamics as well as emerging notions of how public space is practiced and accessed. I revisit Castells' distinction between the space of flows and the space of places, and Kelty's novel formulation about public space as constituted by recursive publics, to propose that text plays a key spatial/organizational role in the network society, and that reading and writing become a distinct mode of engagement with the environment and ultimately a distinct mode of placemaking.

SECTION 2: AESTHETICIZATION of URBAN SPACE

Chairman: Dr. **Alexa Färber** (IfEE, HU, Berlin)

Marc Bieling, DIE DRAUSSENWERBER GmbH, Berlin, Germany; Tom Bieling, Deutsche Telekom Laboratories, Berlin, Germany

“Advertisement in public spaces: aesthetical and economical effects of privatization”

On the border of private and public space, the “private people, assembled to a public” (Habemas 1962) actively take part on the design of public space (Erlhoff, Marshall, 2007). With the proliferation of advertising spaces on public ground to the private sector, the process of privatization of public space is enhanced. On the one hand, private investors will seek to defend 'their' territory against competitors or acts of vandalism. On the contrary citizen will try to defend 'their' city against commercial interest.

Brandes and Erlhoff (2005) claim, that human behaviour and different ways of (re-)use with public objects, do often not satisfy individual demands of emotional, functional or aesthetic demands. Official or unofficial public design is, however, being developed by different stakeholders, mainly represented by three groups of interest: a) public or governmental institutions, that also coordinate the urban planning. b) commercial businesses, influencing cityscapes e.g. by advertising their goods through print-advertisement, shop-windows or other brand-presence. c) People, bringing their private life into public space simply by them being present alone or by using public objects in an intended or non-intended way. The Latter, the “urban passengers” (Brandes) temporarily intervene in the design of public space, by adding an own, unplanned, usage to an existing infrastructure.

In this paper we will discuss influences of public street-furniture on general human spatial interaction. How do we act in space and how do we interact with or via built environment? To what extent does the “urban passenger” intervene in the design of public space? How do objects in public space make room for private or public, unplanned or structured interactions? What characterizes a city? What about the Interfaces between Architecture, People and Technology?

Tobias Scheidegger, University of Zürich; Institut für Populäre Kulturen, Switzerland

“Architectural visualizations as promoters of urban aestheticization. A visual culture approach”

My paper presents some aspects of a recently published case study on the political impacts of computer generated architectural visualizations. Today, those digitally rendered images are commonly used in the public communication of construction projects. The main objective of those visualizations is the photorealistic illustration of a building still in planning stage. But by surrounding the images of those buildings with elements of specifically aestheticized public space (streets and places, crowded by well dressed city dwellers, expensive cars etc.), this visual genre also communicates images of a certain „urbanity“: On the one hand the aim is to charge the planned building with additional aesthetical and social values, on the other hand the image intends to anticipate social impacts of the building – once realized – on its surrounding space. That is to say that characterized by their specific commercial-architectural aesthetics, architectural visualizations can be taken as visual sources that are explicitly representing, affirming, and anticipating processes of urban gentrification.

The analysis of this visual culture of architectural communication contributes primarily to your question about the role of aestheticization of social life in the transformation of urban public space. As graphic designers who produce such visualizations underlined, those virtual worlds are clearly articulating a certain ideology of aestheticization which itself reflects the hegemonial lifestyle of middleclass „symbol producers“ (Müller, Dröge 2004). Furthermore – and hereby my paper refers to the questions concerning urban flows too – this virtual public space is also

remarkably distinguished by a visual language of mobility, as sign of economic prosperity (business, shopping) as well as sign of leisure and familiarity (jogging, baby buggies). By presenting empirical case studies on a sample of those visualizations my aim is to demonstrate implications of the aestheticization of the social for the urban public space – or at least its visual representation: processes of making invisible as well as processes of normative visibility which characterize the „public“ in contemporary architectural communication.

Derya Özkan, Institut für Volkskunde / Europäische Ethnologie, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany

“Emerging Representations of “Cool” Istanbul and the Aestheticization of Urban Chaos”

This paper focuses on the issue of "aestheticization" in the case of emerging discourses on Istanbul as a "cool" city in the 2000s. I discuss the notion of “urban chaos,” the ways in which it used to be denounced for being a negative urban quality specific to “third world urbanization” in the 1970s, and the extent to which it has recently been aestheticized as a positive urban quality in representations celebrating Istanbul as a “cool” European city. On what grounds and through which mechanisms of power/knowledge has this discursive change from “a third world city of crude urbanization” to “the cool city” become possible in the 2000s? How and why are emerging representations of Istanbul as a “cool” city so quickly championed both locally and globally? How does this new image of Istanbul relate to older images of Istanbul marked by orientalist vocabulary and imagery? To what extent can we talk about neo-orientalism in discourses on “cool” Istanbul? This paper draws on two major events to discuss the aestheticization of “urban chaos” in Istanbul: The World Congress of Architecture that took place in Istanbul in July 2005 and the Istanbul Photography Biennial in the fall of 2006 with the theme “Chaos and Magic.”

SECTION 3: URBAN AESTHETICIZATION & the ROLE of ART- ists

Chairman: Madlen Pilz (IfEE, HU, Berlin)

Jekaterina Lavrinec, Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Vilnius, Lithuania; Oksana Zaporozhets, Samara State University, Russia

“The Urban Comeback: Lost Places and Aesthetic Re-appropriation of the City”

Seeking to concretize the notion of aestheticization, while recognizing its fruitfulness, we bring into focus “urban games” concept. It is through this concept we actualize city as a space shaped by the performative actions of numerous actors. The rehabilitation of the role of the actor in the production of the city is an important task for social theory as well as for the urban policy as in the late capitalism an urban dweller was turned into the passive object of the economic, political, and cultural structures forming the urban everyday life. We define the urban games as an active reinterpretation of the urban everyday schemes imposed by ‘agents in power’ (political, economic, etc.) by the urban dwellers, which constitutes the city as an arena of creative actions and results in the appropriation of the city by its inhabitants.

Two cases of the creative urban actions realized by the authors in Vilnius (Lithuania) and Samara (Russia) will be presented. In post-soviet cities the alienation of public spaces (resulted in their ‘lostness’) is an intensive process being reinforced by the constellation of communist spatial organization of the cities and the limited habitualization of public places and capitalist privatization and commodification of space. The actions “Bubble the City” (Vilnius) and “Sunday on Monday” (Samara) aimed to re-appropriate lost public spaces encouraging citizens to take part in creative activities and explicate alternative scenarios of the usage of the space. We understand the lost public spaces as the urban areas, which have a potentiality to be a place for meetings and

communication but are rather transitional, empty or abandoned ones. The scenarios of spatial re-appropriation applied in two cases were based on the ideas of the involvement of citizens in the creative practices reinterpreting the spatial, performative, and bodily schemes of the public places.

Laura-Ioana Panait, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj, Romania

“Tracing the art in urban public space: The aesthetics of resistance in post-communist Romania – public art and artists in the city public spaces”

Post-communist period appears to be an on going process in which society is dealing with the rooted “treasures” of the past. Public space, in this dynamics, is a significant indicator of urban changes but also of social practices metamorphosis after 1989.

Romanian public space is still under the pressure of the state so that the urban design often consists of unilateral results. On this background civil society tries to reinforce and reclaim this space with diverse strategies. One of them is by introducing alternative esthetics to the national symbolics offered by the authorities.

Artistic interventions in the Romanian urban public space are impulses proving that the cultural actors are slowly coagulating, recovering from the communism where they were dealing with the private and the public on different parameters. The relationship between creative industries, politics and the public space is still an important debate in post-communist society as a present day symptom. Struggling for freedom of expression and cultural activism means that the transitional Romanian society is slowly heading towards a healthier democracy. By presenting certain case-studies of (independent) art in public space in Bucharest and Cluj I will speak of hybrid tissues indicators, relationship between center and periphery, lack of critical media and the status of the creative community in a still “state-owned” public space.

Through certain strategies of aesthetics, artists try to reach the social and the community and no longer exhibit in an institutionalized frame. By getting out in the public space they gain a new status in their context, a context that is already experiencing the snowball effect.

Celia Ghyka, « Ion Mincu » University for Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania

“Contemporary art: between action and work (Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer)”

While public space has been proclaimed “dead” by many scholars (Habermas, Sennet), nevertheless we assist nowadays to a proliferation of spatial practices pretending to restore public space, a number of of them supported by public urban policies (Barcelona, Lyon, London, Luxembourg).

The ephemeral condition of some of these practices is using speech and image – both of them public - as a main component of their medium. A whole range of contemporary artists challenges the issues of the publicity of urban space, more specifically those of hearing and appearance in the public realm, thus addressing the question of the aestheticization of urban public life. I would like to illustrate these topics by two case-studies: the public projections of Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer. Both artists use architecture and the urban public space as a stage and support for their interventions, which consist in projected images in movement on significant buildings. For Wodiczko, they consist mainly in projecting the history of others (usually those that are socially invisible) and thus offering them visibility, whereas Holzer uses words – written words- as a means to raise public consciousness about hidden violence in our society. These moving images are challenging the image of an ideal, potentially harmonious public space (Habermas, 1962), as opposed to a domain permanently exposed to conflict and negotiation (Deutsche, 1996).

In this post-medium approach (Krauss, 1999), building as well as the public space it sustains is at the same time considered a “medium” for the re-production of a symbolic public realm, politically charged, and a support for the urban space.

By discussing these two case-studies, I would like to bring into debate one of the traditional definitions of the public realm, as given by Hannah Arendt, and particularly the distinction she proposes between *action* (as a condition of plurality) and *work* (as a condition of the human worldliness). Given the moment of Arendt's book, as well as the evolution of contemporary artistic practices after 1960, I would like to investigate the nature of this distinction within the context of temporary interventions into the urban public space. While defining work in general, as an "activity which provides an artificial world of things", Arendt privileges nevertheless a very particular place for the work of art. For her, one of the characteristics of action is to leave no trace, and that is why acting and speaking men need the help of the artist in order to make their action survive. If for her works of art are characterized mainly by their "outstanding permanence" and their tangible nature, action's main characteristic would be its impermanence, as in speaking.

Contemporary practices, such as those of Wodizcko and Holzer, are an impermanent way of bringing on the public stage the question of the Other, of being-with-the-other, offering visibility to this condition.

The question I raise is whether the contemporary context of arts, characterized mainly by their temporality and political agenda, could provide a starting point for a re-invention of the public space, within a new paradigm. In the terms of Arendt, could contemporary art become action and give publicity to the urban space, through the work of an ephemeral art that offers visibility to the invisible and the hidden?

ROUND TABLE:

"ART INTERVENTIONS IN THE CITY PUBLIC SPACE AND THE POTENTIAL FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS"

Moderator: Dr. Oleg Pachenkov (CISR, St.-Petersburg)

Maria Prieto, University of Navarra, School of Architecture, Pamplona, Spain

"Thinking about Representation: Towards a New Politics of Design for Public Space"

Behind the apparent efficacy of spatial policies in city-making, the representation of citizens in interaction with physical space through urban regulations has remained unaddressed in our recent history. At the same time new media artistic engagements are challenging our understanding of time and space. How could our spatial sensibility be realized and expanded by ubiquitous computing? How to enhance urban space through the use of pervasive technologies? Can the social Net re-organize current spatial planning and policy-making practices as open, participative instruments to manage and redesign the public spaces, collective memories, and the actual historical narratives of our cities?

What kind of citizen and urban historian can emerge from the interplay of mobile technologies with physical space? And, to what extent could we consider a just re-constitution of today's hyper-urbanized world by re-assembling cities as networked multi-sensorial spatial extensions of their inhabitants and re-producing their urban histories from an audiovisual archive evolving by the interaction of visitors with the site and the web-site, the local and the global, while allowing public collaboration in city-making?

This paper explores the potential of the spatial applications to the production of historical narratives, deployed by mobile, embedded and distributed "sensitive architectures." It introduces IN HEAR, OUT THERE: AZCA (<http://195.53.62.237/inhearoutthere/>), which is a locative-net.art installation, to explore contemporary urban public spaces and their urban histories, historical spaces and spatial histories, to start thinking about their representations within the city and their (re)articulation with plural, multi-sensorial representations of social space and social change at large.

Mimi Larsson, Rune Drewsen, "Rumkammerat", artists, Copenhagen, Denmark

"Urban Treasure Hunt: a public art strategy to embrace the city"

“Urban Treasure Hunt is a way to discover the streets of Copenhagen through a creative and challenging hunt for artworks and clues. This annual event gives you a unique opportunity for a close encounter with an area of the city that you might not discover on your own. For the Copenhagen city-dwellers the Urban Treasure Hunt is a chance to see the places they pass everyday from a new perspective – and many of them join the fun.

To find the golden treasure chest you must follow the clues and collect numbers, which will be necessary to open the chest in the end. So take care not to miss any posts or clues! On your way you will meet dinosaurs, get a great photo opportunity - and you will find instructions in a cowboy scenery...”

(<http://www.rumkammerat.dk/Urbanenglish.207.aspx>)

Urban Treasure Hunt is an art project designed as a cultural treasure hunt in the urban space, in which anyone can participate free of charge. The concept was developed by Rumkammerat over three years in the streets of Copenhagen, where it has been met with increasing enthusiasm, publicity and financial support. In July 2009 the project was funded by the City of Copenhagen and approximately 600 people completed the challenge, while many more enjoyed the individual installations, which both give a lead to the next location and exist as temporary art installations in the city.

Clara Fohrbeck , NGBK, Berlin

“Contemporary Creation': Challenges for Horizontal Artistic Processes within the Context of Contemporary Urban Culture (Matadero Art center, Madrid)”

I am going to discuss the global and local dimensions of contemporary art and challenges for horizontal artistic processes within contemporary urban culture. I did a case study on the initiative Intermediae, which is part of the Matadero Madrid, centre for contemporary creation. It is an old industrial site - an old slaughterhouse - which has now been transformed (since 2005) into a multidisciplinary centre for contemporary creation. The initiative Intermediae focuses on addressing the local public and on integrating the centre into its local context. I analysed their philosophy of working with and adapting to the artistic 'process'.

Henrik Mayer, Martin Keil, REINUNGSGESELLSCHAFT; Dresden, Germany

"Re-Naming Streets in Zagreb".

“The project provides a possibility for voluntary initiatives and civil society organizations to create ideas for new street names and present them in public space. It is an invitation for committed citizens to present their ideas about the society they live in, and also about the future. They were asked to propose street names that define goals and concepts of their organization and the civil society.

Starting point of the project is the fact that street names have always expressed a specific idea on how history or reality should be viewed. This becomes evident when we remember how many streets have been renamed in times of great changes in political systems. The interaction between the new street signs and the old original plates in the streets shall bring attention to the current social events in the city. This renaming creates a sensibility for the synergies and contradictions in the development of a society, so strongly influenced by the overlapping of public and private interests”

(http://www.reinigungsgesellschaft.de/projekte/2006/change_reality_en.htm).