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Urban Landscapes and Social Ambiences Under Mobility Dynamics: Barcelona City

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By studying the dynamics of mobility we are able to make out the contours that are shaped by those who transit and occupy the city's different places. Barcelona, a city known as a place of interchange and migrations, comes up as throbbing with the ever-changing *pulse of the community*, while the interactions of its agents as builders of spaces and atmospheres greatly rely on the fulfilment of its interests and needs. The starting point for the ethnographic research employed has been a theatrical methodology coupled with an anthropological perspective, a double strategy that allows us to centre on the co-existence of the different social sectors that make use of the common spaces – means of transport, city squares, *ramblas*, avenues, shops, gathering points. The main of our inquiries focuses on the expressions displayed by humans, animals, and operated machines, which generate environments by means of bodies, their contours, representations, and mobilities. To tackle the understanding of these environmental processes two perspectives are used: on the one hand, the theming of environments; on the other, social ambiances. From the tensions between individual and collective manifestations, between the static and the movable, the micro and the macro, this article centres on the creation of environments by setting out from an analysis of the mobilities currently taking place in this city's public spaces.

UNDERSTANDING MOBILITY DYNAMICS

The concept of urban landscape is inevitably bound to evoke static figures; this may explain why landscape management and intervention, at least in Spain, has been relegated to engineers, agronomists, geographers, architects, and urban planners. In reflecting on the dynamism of the urban landscape, theorisations about its relation to perceptions have been carried out (see Moya, 2011), and in that sense it can be seen to imply human participation, and must therefore be given more attention from other social and humanistic disciplines. On the other hand, the concept of social environment is dissolved in a mass of interpretations, going from bi-directional ecological aspects derived from the interrelation between natural and social environments, to moralistic and hygienist approaches that blur the focus on immediate actions resulting from the interactions between agents and environments.

Awareness of mobility therefore involves dynamics with a certain degree of added difficulty, since it is almost invariably a matter of ephemeral and changing situations. It does, however, allow for more openness and flexibility before constant changes. Although the study of mobility and its dynamics can diverge into a multiplicity of specificities, we do get approaches that go from micro-studies to global outlooks, whereby we can move from the slightest body gesture to migratory displacements. The concept of mobility has several meanings today that point to the communications media and the means of transport, as well as economic, political, labour, geographic, and sustainability.

The concept of *mobility* in its social dimension was conceived in 1924 by Burgess, who gave it an analogical sense by comparing the pulse of the human body to *the pulse of the community*. He classified its elements into a) state of mutability of the person, b) number and kind of contacts or stimulations in his environment. Another important aspect is his distinction between movement and mobility. Movement is not in itself a sign of change or growth. In fact, there are fixed and unchanging movements whose function is to control a constant situation, such as routine movements. *Movement that is significant for growth implies a change of movement in response to a new stimulus or situation*. A change of movement of this kind is what is called *mobility*. A routine movement is typically expressed in terms of going to and from work. A change of movement, or mobility, might be typically expressed as an adventurous outing. Mobility would thus imply some change, new experiences, stimulation.

For Burgess, writing in the past century, the global changes in the cities did not yet include the socio-economic effects that we are currently experiencing, thus our critical turn to his distinction between movement and mobility with respect to routine and its stimuli. In today's global cities, such as Barcelona, well known for its tourist appeal, the most evident changes can be observed in the increasing flow of people, both tourists and immigrants. The flush of new stimuli observable in the daily displacements of its inhabitants has changed over the past two decades, while tourist offer is also on the rise. The assimilation of new social groups into the city's common spaces has involved the adaptation of its inhabitants to the new stimuli, thereby transforming their most routine-led movements into movements that involve various degrees of adaptability, therefore mobility.

During the fieldwork that we carried out in Barcelona's Metro (Underground) beginning in 2009, situations were perceived in which the presence of some groups of tourists was creating a social rhythm that was not like every-day life. In this space, as its inhabitants go to their workplaces for example, their routine movements get soaked in diverse ambiances, when

some of such tourist groups burst out in loud voices during a spree, provoking sometimes, depending on the degree to which the spheres have been transgressed, some confrontations with other passengers. Situations like this, which were clearly observable in the Metro a few years ago, are currently spreading with increasing regularity to the city's different spaces. What I want to highlight with these examples is that the inhabitants' needs must adapt before the new and diverse stimuli produced in a touristified city.

For our current research, ethnographic work is being done in relation to several vehicles that are used in Barcelona's public space; this is giving us guidelines for identifying specific mobility and environmental dynamics that I am using as markers between different social sectors. As an example of this, supermarket trolleys are increasingly being seen treading the public spaces, and can today be found almost all over the city, used mostly by low-income or homeless people. These people rummage through the rubbish in order to find recyclable objects and material that they then try to resell. The trolleys are also used as little shelters to live and store certain belongings in. Such vehicles contrast with the boom of motorised cycles, scooters, and other personal transportation devices lately available on hire for tourists. When both figures happen to meet, we witness a dissociation of images and goals, interests and needs – in terms of the mobility of its actors in the city's public spaces– like kaleidoscope pieces in which both situations seem fragmented from each other as if they did not belong to the same time and place.

ON THE PRODUCTION OF ENVIRONMENTS

To analyse the production of environments in the public space we found it necessary to recognise its socio-spatial dimension according to two perspectives: the *theming of the environment* (Gottdiener, 2001), and the *sensible ambiances* (CRESSON, Centre de recherches sur l'espace sonore et l'environnement urbain- Grenoble). Both have helped me to discern the environmental traits. As to the *emotional ambiances*, I have not for the moment considered them separately, but rather as part of other situations producing ambiances.

According to Gottdiener, the *themed environment* is the material product of two social processes. In the first place, he refers to "socially constructed, built environments –about large material forms that are designed to serve as containers for commodified human interaction." In the second place, he talks of "themed material forms that are products of a cultural process aimed at investing constructed spaces with symbolic meaning and at conveying that meaning to inhabitants and users through symbolic motifs" (2001:5) From a thematic point of view, tourist cities use marketing and other corporative strategies to frame their offer of activities in a shop window, increasingly striving to transform users, passers-by, and inhabitants, into clients.

In our previous study on the theming of Barcelona's Metro, where we considered the importance of this means of transport as a space of power, we observed how this public service is continuously advertising itself with the aim of gaining more users or clientele, increasingly resorting to acoustic and visual ambiances to impact on user behaviour. To add to this marketing environment, ticket prices were increased and surveillance control of users intensified, including illegal practices by the company involving security guards discriminating in favour of tourists over city dwellers. On occasions, we got to witness the trampling of user rights in relation to a legal or non-legal residence in the country, by which the possibility of using this means of transport was denied them through sheer threat of imprisonment. Against Metro's *thematization*, citizens have reacted in the social networks by

rejecting and denouncing the managerial abuses of this public service, pointing to the lack of coherence in punitive policies that disregard the shortages and needs presently suffered by the population, and in particular claiming their right to move about the city. This practice can be regarded as an instance of *anti-thematization* of the environment. Much like the Metro, the city also is selling its own image so that tourists will arrive with a pre-formed image of what they should do, see, and visit (see Relph, 1987).

Sensible areas in space are those that are reachable through perceptions. That is why they are so debatable, and therefore difficult to pinpoint and analyse (see Amphoux, 2004). They are perceived by way of acoustic, visual, atmospheric, rhythmical, temporal, even kinetic manifestations, present in the gestural and body movements of the people passing by.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIAL PERFORMATIVITY

We may see the city as a theatre of social action in which urban functions are intensified when they are played out on that stage which is street life (Mumford, 1961). In carrying out our ethnography of environments, our resort to techniques and perspectives from the theatre has proved a helpful tool for assimilating separately the different elements that make up environments. Therefore we made a separation between stage (streets) and scenography (architecture), singling out the different props (objects) given in space. We also classified ambiances as: a) sound or acoustic, b) lighting, c) olfactory, d) tactile, e) atmospheric, f) magnetic, g) rhythmical, h) kinetic, i) memory ambiances.

There are some anthropological approaches to the study of environments; for example, the anthropology of movement, which works on the principle that the rhythms of social life appear as an expression of lifestyle, and schedules pertaining to work, meals, and entertainment are individual and collective rhythms moulding the social rhythm (Tarrus, 1988). That is why the pulse of the community is also an important concept to understand how the environment is built. The anthropology of environments that we are in course of developing allows us to understand the adaptations and capacities through which people modify their acts and behaviours in different surroundings. And how the social dynamics of movement and space, to configure environments, are influenced by those same acts and behaviours, which should be understood as the performative capacity of the individual in his socio-spatial dimension —this is, as *social performativity*.

CONCLUSIONS

As said before, the city of Barcelona stands as an example of a touristified and globalised city. Through the study of its mobility and environmental dynamics we can discern its characteristics and processes. Apart from the specific traits ascribed to a society or culture, there are economic, political, and historical aspects that show up in a socio-corporal biography, in the case of individuals, and a socio-spatial geography, in the case of spaces and collectives, which are crucial in the mobility of individuals in relation to their surroundings.

Whatever the case, we may wonder about the exploitation of tourism taking place in cities: is it having a beneficial effect on the society that engages in it, or is it causing a dislocation between the different social sectors? It is well known that a rise in tourism brings about a rise in the number of immigrants, most of who take over the service jobs. Could it be said that the

increasing distance between the welfare of the tourist and the precariousness of the immigrant is fostering social development?

The implementing of tourist spaces in cities or towns is believed to produce an increase in job opportunities. But to what degree does the over-exploitation of such spaces transform cities and their inhabitants into *service cities and servicing communities*? We have observed that better services are implemented to cover tourist demands, whereas the needs of the population are being placed aside. This includes the immigrants, who are mostly in charge of providing services, ranging from cleaning chores to sexual services, always with a view to satisfy and nourish an image created for tourism.

The tourist, in turn, is displaying an ever more dislocated self-image, as if no longer in possession of a sense of personal objectives, no longer able to convey to society any clear-minded goals. This depiction is based on observations we made in certain tourist areas in the city downtown. Most of these spaces are full of pavement cafés with chairs and tables on the street, and yet the landscape is not exactly inviting, it can actually look somewhat desolate, due to the surrounding heaps of rubbish and fetid smells, and the occasional homeless people who wander by. For the undisturbed tourist, it is as if this landscape, this atmosphere, were a spectacle forming part of the entertainment. A few days ago a law was passed in the Hungarian parliament banning homeless people from the capital (www.hrw.org, 10/01/2013). To hide or force such people out to other spaces would evidently generate more problems, but setting apart several spaces in the city for the exclusive use of tourists would be like creating a new social class, “the tourist class”, apparently enjoying privileges for the simple reason of belonging to that class—at least for the duration of their holiday season.

The final question would be, how the inhabitants of a certain city can adapt to its hyper-ambiences without a gross misappropriation of their own sense of self and belonging.

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