

Change, Conflict, and Resistance: Information Technologies, Urban Segregation and the Problem of Lived Space

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Abstract—This paper initiates with a debate on the urban polarization and segregation, governed with consumption-driven culture fueled by information technologies and advanced transportation. Following the transformations of public spaces into “private public spaces”, and the phenomena of the malls as a case, from a Lefebvrian perspective, the main argument of the paper is that, while having “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance” in its very nature, if the “lived space” experiences in these terms can exist in these “private public spaces”? The discussion will end with a suggestion stating that, the information technologies have great potentials to promote Lefebvrian “lived space” experiences and offer new fields for social interactions as well as possibility for “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance”.

Keywords—Information technologies, Lived Space, Urban Segregation, Lived Space, Lefebvre.

I. INTRODUCTION

The effect of information technologies and advanced transportation on the urban segregation is a fact of our age. The present paper will argue how capitalist mode of production and consumption uses the potential of these technologies to transform urban morphology to ensure continuous cycle of production and consumption. With this respect, the second part will focus on one of the new “private public space” types emerged through this transformation and take the mall as a case, to examine the new social characteristics of these spaces and to extend the discussion towards Lefebvrian “lived space” experiences in terms of “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance”. The third part will try to illustrate that, although these spaces seem to replace the genuine urban spaces such as “old city center”, “Town Square”, “main street”, “neighborhood”, “sidewalks”, to reproduce social interaction, in essence they are abstract, dominated spaces designed purely for consumption and the promotion of consumption, and “lived space” experiences in these spaces do not allow “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance”. The final part, before completing the cycle, will return to the discussion of information technologies, and will show, contrary to the left intellectual’s general belief, the importance of these technologies for the existence and promotion of actions of “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance”. In addition, the paper will suggest, from these technologies, the Internet also provides new spaces for such struggles. The final part completes the cycle, aiming not to have clear-cut conclusions by taking a position, but rather have an intention

to raise some questions and make a brainstorming about the present situation. Therefore because of this circular structure, at the end, the discussion can be continued, by returning the arguments at the very beginning of the paper making our understanding of the situation deeper.

II. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES & URBAN SEGREGATION

“...on December 14, 1995 at the huge Walden Galleria Mall on the edge of Buffalo, USA, an employee of the mall, Cynthia Wiggins, was trying to cut across a seven-lane highway from the public city bus stop when she was run down and killed by a 10-ton truck. City busses were not allowed to enter the mall, every aspect of which had been designed to attract high-spending middle and upper income consumers traveling exclusively by car.” [1]

“...in the downtown cores of North American cities like Houston, Toronto and Minneapolis, the extending logic of ‘skywalk’ systems is bypassing the traditional street system. Skywalks link extending webs of office and shopping complexes downtown with carefully monitored, air conditioned, and hermetically-sealed pedestrian networks...” [2]

These two “tales” are epitomizing the condition that we are observing in metropolises recently: socioeconomic and spatial urban polarization and segregation. In fact, as Graham & Marvin states, this is the “...part of the ongoing economic, social and cultural change surrounding the shift to post-modern urbanism...” [3] In such case, metropolises consist of multiple centres connected via networks of transportation and communication. These centres can be named as the “Global Citadels” or “Neo-Medieval Mini fortresses”, “repadded white bunkers.” Infrastructure of these spaces is planned according the life standards of the “consumers”, and for their exclusive accessibility. The network of highways is constructed, so that “...globally-distant places can be relationally connected very intimately” by bypassing the spaces in-between. The bypassed territories are “switched off” territories where people from “outer space” live and do not have an access to infrastructural networks.

This structural organization is oriented from the dynamics of capitalist mode of production and consumption, which will be discussed furthermore in the following parts. However, at this point we might conclude that what makes it available is clearly existence of information technologies (telematics,

telecommunications, Internet, etc.) and advanced transportation systems.

III. THE SPACES OF CONSUMPTION: "END OF PUBLIC SPACE"

The impetus in the construction of this new layer above the existing city had a basic main reason: ensuring the continuous cycling of production and consumption, and ascertain reproduction of work power by means of leisure. Thus, the network is designed to have maximum profitability between nodes of work, home, and leisure, and have a maximum control over citizens. Shopping Malls are such places designed so that the capital has maximum control on consumption. In addition, these are not merely shopping centers where only shopping takes place, but at the same time offer a full set of brilliant and attractive set of events, activities and leisure. In a sense, malls provide a type of public space, and urban space by using the "old city center," "Town Square," "Main Street," "neighborhood", "sidewalks" analogies. However, in principle, malls do not operate as a part of the city; on the contrary, they are designed to operate as a small city, totally isolated from the outside, only connected to other nodes of consumption through the information and transportation networks. They intend to provide all the activities of the daily social life such as leisure-time activities, catering, and cultural activities. [4] These are virtually public spaces, in fact "packed and themed...controlled so that what happens in them and who visit them is extremely predictable and consumption driven." [5] Baudrillard [6] describes this arrangement as "consumption line" by using the "production line" analogy. Same as production lines, the organization of malls therefore guarantee continuous fast consumption. In addition, as Lefebvre [7] states, "they serve the reproduction of production relations."

Such places can be either newly produced (as we observe in malls), or reproduced by capitalist dynamics. Reproduction may vary from gentrification of city centers and transforming the centers into new shopping arcades, to reproduction of "oeuvres" of old times such as two examples of Venice and Tuscany, where "in the order capitalism, these are converted into products." [8] Similarly, Christine Boyer [9] states, "contemporary spectator in quest of public urban spaces increasingly must stroll through recycled and revalued territories that have been turned into gentrified, historicized, commodified, and privatized places." [10] No matter if these spaces use main street metaphor, or simulate nostalgia of old Paris or Venice, in essence there is no real experience, encounter, emergence, or event in these spaces.

IV. "PRIVATE PUBLIC SPACES" & PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATIONAL SPACE

From his well-known triad of "moments of social space": spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, Lefebvre defines representational space or lived space as "...[the] space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do

no more than describe." [11] He points out that "[It] is the dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate", and therefore experienced passively. Soja [12], in "Dialectics of cityspace," extends Lefebvre's emphasis on "seeking change" and "appropriation of space." He expands Lefebvrian "representational space" as Thirdspace. For Soja Thirdspace is "...the spatial specificity of urbanism...a simultaneously real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, locus of structured individual and collective experience and agency." [13] In congruence with Lefebvre, he believes that "Lived Space" or Thirdspace is an "...active arena of development and change, conflict and resistance, an impelling force affecting all aspects of our lives." [14]

At this point, we would raise the main question of the paper once more: While having "change," "conflict," and "resistance" in its very nature, are "lived space" experiences in these terms is possible in "private public spaces"? Obviously, it is hard to give a clear answer. However, we have chance to dwell on the nature of these spaces in these terms, to find out some clues leading us to understand this relation.

These new, "private public spaces" are dominated spaces, which have published and hidden codes of conduct. They do not operate as an extension of the city space, but rather they are isolated spaces in themselves. Therefore, access to these spaces is very much under control. With the help of technology and surveillance systems, and private security, the behavior inside the boundaries is mediated. In short, in physical terms these spaces do not allow free physical or bodily experiences. Therefore, we may ask if this means, that these control mechanisms do prevent possibilities of "change," "conflict," and "resistance." The answer is no. By referring Lefebvre and Soja, we may say that such rules or codes are prerequisite for the existence of "change," "conflict," and "resistance." Simply, for breaking up, or overriding something, or changing something, there has to be something solid to override or change. Therefore, can we say that these spaces allow representational space experiences in terms of "change," "conflict," and "resistance"? The answer is still not clear.

These spaces are designed to be replaced, and reproduced. They cannot belong to anybody, and nobody can belong to these spaces. Being and experience in these spaces is temporary and ephemeral. No one can leave traces or signs on these spaces, since they are sterile. These spaces simply do not remember, and cannot be remembered. There can be no history of such spaces, and no memories exist about these spaces since you cannot leave traces.

For example, there can be no graffiti on the surfaces of these places drawn by teenagers. This does not mean that literally graffiti cannot be drawn on the surfaces of these places, but because they are just replicable, or replaceable.

"Private Public Spaces" are not designed to be appropriated, they do not allow appropriation: Are there any beggars in shopping malls or business centers? It should be noted that, at this point, design and especially the spatial design fields may reopen and reconsider means of a traditional debate, i.e. context, in such an urban environment [15][16].

Two questions may be raised deriving from the previous discussions: What is the identity of individuals developed in these homogenous places and the public relations which they offer, and what are the characteristics of “social space” produced in these public spaces where the communal experience is stimulated and designed? It is obvious that social relations at these spaces are not same as we observe in the genuine city public spaces. Of course, there are social relations in these spaces, but these are not emergent and random social relations based on physical and bodily experiences and social frictions. The social relations are constructed on the patterns of consumption. The representation of individuals in these spaces is in the form of consumption: “I can consume, therefore I am one of them.” Individuality is also observed in the form of consumption, by buying the brands (or rather “referring signs”) pointing certain lifestyles and fashions: “I wear Levi’s, therefore I am different, free, crazy, and what not.”

Lived space experiences require a heterogeneous mixture of individuals gathering around a focal point: from students to workers, rockers to skaters, businessperson to beggars. It needs social relations oriented from real outdoor experiences, and dependent on emergent encounters, coinciding events, randomness, etc. This requires democratic, real, social, or public space where all the citizens interact and encounter each other physically, debate issues, learn from each other, and develop from this rich environment. We can only observe lived space experiences within public spaces and squares. Only such spaces make the “lived space” experiences or the appropriation of space possible, not the spaces produced from homogenous highway culture i.e. shopping malls.

We remember struggle of Tiananmen and the resulting Beijing Massacre of June 4 in 1989 with the name of square, which makes the struggle possible.

V. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES REVISITED

Before completing the cycle, we will return to the discussion to Information Technologies. As we have discussed in the first part of the paper, information technologies, and advanced transportation seem to be fueling the “...emergence of new, more highly polarized social and cultural landscapes in cities.” In Lefebvre’s [17] words, “technological utopia [is] a sort of computer simulation of the future, or of the possible within the framework of the real- the framework of the existing mode of production.” In terms of mode of production, this statement addresses the ‘neocapitalism’. He holds that technologies are utilized to serve the fueling of capitalist production and reproduction. Information technologies and Internet can be interpreted as such “technological utopia”. In congruence Castells [18] contends, “...[the] libertarian spirit of capitalism finally found itself at home at the last frontier where organizational networks and information flows dissolve locales and supersede societies. Informationalism and capitalism have historically merged in a process of techno-economic restructuring ...” [19]

Internet and cable televisions can also be counted as new fields of consumption. Moreover, information technologies, especially public ones: radios, televisions and the Internet can

be used for affecting the “society of spectacle”, by influencing beliefs and expectations to promote consumption. These can be used as a propaganda device. The importance of media is obvious. As stated by Baudrillard, [20] Gulf War was not actually fought in the Middle East but on global media. More recently, we remember the “embedded” reporters in the tanks of USA, and suppressing of the images or videos of the World Trade Center incidence.

VI. COMPLETING THE CYCLE: “CHANGE”, “CONFLICT”, AND “RESISTANCE” & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

Spatial practice leading to representational space first requires democratic, real, social or public space where all the citizens interact and encounter each other as we have discussed, on the other hand, I will suggest that “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance” beg for publicity of the activity. This publicity is cannot be produced only by means of physical interaction but more through media: we do not directly experience or see anymore but rather being informed. In other words, these experiences need an assistance of media for the initiation, promotion and the success.

One may conclude that riots were erupted after the Rodney King verdict was announced on April 29, 1992. On the contrary, the present paper will suggest that the idea was already out there and triggered not by the verdict itself but rather after broadcasting of video recordings of the Rodney King beating in the media. If there were no video recorder to record the incidence and no media available to publish it, probably the riots would not be triggered. This does not mean that the unrest does not existed once but provoked by media, on the contrary, there was unrest, but media made it triggered, promoted and made it public.

Contrary to obvious dystopian positions of the Left intellectuals about information technologies, it could be that, they do not deserve to be fully rejected, especially the Internet at all. As stated by Harvey [21], information technologies help us for making the world smaller and eliminate the place and territory. Physical proximity loses importance and new types of social interactions become possible. Social agents may interact without the limitations of location and time, through surfing, publishing web pages, e-mail, Usenet news groups, online games, IRC, ICQ, and so on so far. Internet is somewhat different from other telecommunications devices such as radio or television. It is popular, available, and makes “one to one,” “one to many” and reciprocal communication possible different than other technologies. For example, anyone can establish a radio station in 20 minutes with almost no cost and immediately start broadcasting.

Furthermore “change”, “conflict”, and “resistance” is possible in Internet, in fact, these exist in its very nature, in various scales, available for individuals to the groups sharing same interests. Internet is offering both a publicity support for lived space experiences, and at the same time provides Cyberspace to make new social interactions and lived space experiences possible, and therefore deserve to be reconsidered.

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