



Urban Transformation and the Public Realm: Some Notes on the Contemporary City

Manoel Rodrigues ALVES, Prof.
Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil
mra@sc.usp.br,

In the contemporary heterotopic society the urban space of “ageographical cities” (according to Michael Sorkin definition) promotes new ambiguities. As such, not only it (urban space) brings together what is ordinary and diverse, but it also creates new urban landscapes: material, political, economical and ethnical. Landscapes that do not necessarily articulate with each other, but, on the contrary, transferring civic activities to private spaces, promote social and spatial segregation in a privatized space.

In fact, contemporary urban space results from a different sense of urbanity that has been transforming the public / private relationship. The contemporary city not only generates new spatialities and sociabilities, as well as presents important transformations to urban territorial patterns, but also offers new hybrid and overlapping configurations,

However, it does so in such a way that contemporary urban architectural thought confronts itself with, or sustain, the prevailing tendency of capital upon culture. As a consequence, promoting an ever increasingly privatized and gentrified urban space, contemporary culture is related to consumption and its practices to a mediation of the capital circulation.

It is true that any investigation about the spatiality of the contemporary city must come to terms with these and other new aspects related to its conformation and configuration, to a certain extent result of new social and technical realities in a strongly mediatic society. However, it is also true that in a time where individual experience is built up on displacement and detachment, where the urban space loses social meaning as a consequence of de-territorialized urban forms, it (investigation) demands an argument for public spaces representative of the social plurality of today’s urban space - a plurality of hybrid realities as in any other moment.

Though, nowadays, instead of answering to basic social needs on time, space and routine daily life, space production is basically determined to answer the needs of keeping alive production, circulation and consumption of goods in a highly globalized world. That is to say, city as commodity. Taking the stand against this approach and analyzing particular issues related to contemporary public urban spatialities the paper argues that it is necessary to question what should be the public realm today. Moreover, we should focus on the (re)signification of new multi-referential territorialities of urban space public domain, observing that this challenge must be aware of some possible ‘avant-garde urban pitfalls’.

KEY WORDS: Public realm, public domain, urban spatialities and territorialities, privatized spaces, consumption.