

The Politics of Place: Critical of Spatial Identities and Critical Spatial Identities

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Discussions of identity and space have become prominent in critical geography in recent years. We intend to look at the critical potential of these issues, at the question of how politics can align with place and identities. Herein we intend to sketch a dialogue of two concepts, which could be discerned as "critical spatial identities" and "critical of spatial identities".

In brief, "critical spatial identities" can be imagined to be the outcome of an adherence to critical values (left-wing, multicultural, working-class), connected with a localised culture, firmly linked with a place or a locality. This serves as the material basis, the home range of the critical group. All this is connected with the notion of "identity", the belonging of individuals to these groups and ideas, linked with the place as spatial identity.

A critique of these ideas is a central concern of many post-structuralist and deconstructivist approaches to identity, as well as to space and place. The position is as follows: There is no such thing as a place or a community per se, but these are mere constructions of discourses and practices. These are always tied to positions of power and are embedded in systems of exclusion and inclusion. Nevertheless this position does not deny the existence of spatial identities, but criticises its often essentialist character by emphasising underlying power structures.

The issues raised by either perspective can be grasped under the terms "power", "place", "identity", and "other". First, we want to introduce a theoretical dialogue on these issues, drawing on Foucault, Lefèbvre and de Certeau. Secondly, we will look at two case studies, Hamburg and Berlin. And finally, we would like to discuss the outcomes of the case studies with respect to theoretical conceptualisations.

I

Place, power, identity and the Other: we would like to start with a combination of place, power and the Other. Other places, other spaces..., Michel Foucault defines "des espaces autres", other spaces. The most general definition is that of places, that are related to all other places (spaces) but form a certain opposition to these. In general, they are embedded in a system of spatial effects of power and are located in a society where all places are in a certain relation to power and to each other. As opposed to "utopias", places of fantasy, heterotopias are utopias turned real, are mirror-places, connect real and unreal and are composed of virtual boundaries against all other places around them.

Heterotopias are heterogeneous spaces: "Places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites (...) are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." (Foucault 1986:24)

Foucault states that heterotopias exist in any society. They can take the shape of primitive or deviant heterotopias, primitive ones being places connected to biographical transformations (birth, death, defloration) and deviant ones to illnesses in their broadest definition.

Heterotopias adjust to social change, changing their role and location. They can be places of juxtaposition, a microcosm of society, such as theatres or gardens. They can be places of a certain connection to time, such as museums or libraries. Heterotopias dispose of rites of opening and closure, such as cleaning rituals or checking-in procedures. They are assigned specific roles and functions for society, roles of compensation or illusion: "each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society." (ibid., p. 25)

So much for the Foucauldian heterotopias. There are a number of problems with this idea of 'other spaces': What is their connection with power? How many places are other places? Is any place somehow heterotopic?

A broad range of literature is based on these conceptions of heterotopia (see Hetherington 1997 for an overview). Mostly, Foucault's concept has been interpreted in the way of "counterplaces", as sites of resistance against hegemonic discourses. Yet our short overview has produced a number of questions that also lead to a questioning of the *idea* of counterplaces, of locating places at the same time within as well as outside reality, as microcosm or heterogeneous place. The first critique is on the indetermination of his concept. The second critique we offer is that it does not conform to his concept of power that locates alternation in places. By stating that each heterotopia has a determined function, uncontrolled changes become impossible. The third critique is that it remains unclear whether heterotopias are merely defined in oppositions (difference as dichotomy) or carrier of inherent qualities such as heterogeneity (difference as diversity).

A look at Henri Lefèbvre's concept of heterotopia may help to answer these questions. His concept is connected to his idea of the "The Production of Space", based on the assumption that every society produces its specific space - i. e. every society, understood in terms of modes of production and social regimes, is spatialised in a unique way. This spatialisation is connected with the individual through spatial practices and representations. The space of a society is formed as an instrument for those in power. Its spatial code isolates and separates fragments of everyday life.

Two branches in his theory can be followed now: one is the task he sets for his work. He searches for, and wishes, a spatial code different from the dominant code.

"The first thing such a code would do is recapture the unity of dissociated elements, breaking down such barriers as that between private and public, and identifying both confluences and oppositions in space that are at present indiscernible." (Lefèbvre 1991:64).

Lefèbvre wishes a code that allows a different thinking of space, and it becomes clear that he does not refer to a different thinking as simply the opposite of the dominant thinking, but of an - almost - impossible thinking. Yet it is not enough to think space differently, this code must also allow a different practice. In short, it would be the sign of a different society, a revolutionary code.

The second branch deals with the functions of power and the possibility of this code. It can be found in utopias as a notion that has no place in space. Space is divided into isotopias and heterotopias: "iso-

topias, or analogous spaces; *heterotopias*, or mutually repellent spaces; and *utopias*, or spaces occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary." (ibid., p. 366). Isotopias as places of sameness and repetition, heterotopias as other places, ambivalent places of the other which is at the same time excluded and included (Lefèbvre 1972: 138) - the role of utopia is unclear; Lefèbvre defines it as between presence and absence. What is clear is the role of the utopia as foreshadowing the above mentioned "differential reality", "in which the words do not separate any longer, but transform to immanent differences, the transgression of the open and closed, the present and the mediated". (ibid., p. 46f, translation U.B.)

If Lefèbvre evades a clear definition of utopias in space but defines them as opposed to ideology, he locates isotopias and heterotopias within ideology, within a dominant practice of space, as opposed elements defined by this opposition. Lefèbvre's concept demonstrates how the spatialisation of deviance is only a product of a division into iso- and heterotopias, defined by hegemony. A definition through place is thus automatically a definition through a dominant practice - it is not the construction of an alternative code.

Differently from Foucault who traces certain characteristics in a heterotopia, Lefèbvre makes clear that these characteristics are merely based on the division of space into isotopias and heterotopias, always ensuring that space is a product of a given society, a dominant practice, and so are heterotopias. Utopias, the places of fundamental difference, are not in this space. The question remains whence this concept can gain dynamics and transcend the fixedness. Where does the revolution start?

Michel de Certeau is equally concerned to link place, practice and power. His theory of practice can be useful in two aspects: the analysis of disciplinary power and everyday practice, as well as his analysis of "heterologies", the discourse on the other.

He asks: "[W]hat popular procedures (also 'miniscule' and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them?" (de Certeau 1984:XIV) In this context, his definition of strategy and tactics becomes important. Whereas strategy is located in the service (and site) of power, tactics operate against these localities and localisations, without relying on a fixed site. "A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it. [...] I call a 'tactic', on the other hand, a calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localisation), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. [...] A tactic insinuates itself to the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance." (ibid., p. XIX)

The relation between strategy and tactics is thus a directly spatial relation. Where strategy (or, in Foucault's terms, practices of power) is closely linked to territory and classification, tactics as practice against the practices of power are not defined by the site. But both operate in the same space.

"But what distinguishes them at the same time concerns the *types of operations* and the role of spaces: strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose these spaces, when those operations take place, whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces." (ibid., p. 29f)

De Certeau transfers this concept to the city, where he observes the relation of strategy and tactics. The city is a product of an "urban discourse" establishing the city as a universal subject, detached from time or history, as a concept of clean and purified space with an urge to ongoing purification practices. In this space, de Certeau identifies the play of tactics: "[B]ut the city is left prey to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power. [...] Beneath the discourses that ideologise the city, the ruses and combinations of powers that have no readable identity proliferate, without points where one can take hold of them, without rational transparency, they are impossible to administer." (ibid., p. 95)

Reading de Certeau with Foucault and Lefèbvre in mind, we find that he challenges a problem that arises through a focus on power, namely the problem of change. De Certeau adapts Foucault's ideas on disciplinary power. He locates the potential of change not in space - determined by this power - but in a multiplicity of practices as opposed to only a single power/space.

In the following two case studies we want to examine the mechanisms of the production of such "other places/spaces" by drawing on questions of power, space and difference. We want to follow practices, counter-practices and possibly tactics. Both examples are internationally renowned as "other spaces": Berlin-Kreuzberg and Hamburg-St. Pauli.

II

In the past, the district Kreuzberg in Berlin has served as an inner-urban periphery to be rented out to migrants; it has been stigmatised as a ghetto, was the battleground where hippie-visionists fought for independence and alternative lifestyles, and has assumed the role of a "fascinating" night-life district (Lang 1998).

In the 80s, there was a discourse on Kreuzberg and especially in Kreuzberg that represented a melange of multiculturalism, ethnic and alternative lifestyles. This discourse bore the elements of Kreuzbergers' collective identities, centred on home-place and countercultures. Then, in debates on urban politics, Kreuzberg was the model for local alternative politics, of the influence of countercultures through the locality. Locality, in these discussions, was defined as a resource for critical (urban) politics (Hoffmann Axthelm 1986). Barbara Lang termed Kreuzberg, with reference to Foucault, an 'other place', as a heterogeneous place (Lang 1998).

On the other hand, the stigmatisation of Kreuzberg as a chaotic, criminal territory, as Turkish ghetto, can also be traced back to the 80s. In the view of a leading conservative politician: "With all these foreigners, Lummer [the politician] says, the whole environment has become estranged for the Germans in Kreuzberg, 'commencing with the smells'. They were right in thinking: 'This is not my home any longer, but they have stolen it from me in a certain way.'" (Lummer quoted in Der Spiegel , 9.1.1984, p. 78; translation: U. B.)

All these elements of the picture are still present today, when the dominant representation of Kreuzberg has turned to the ghetto again. The dominant discourses are exclusionary on the one hand, isolating Kreuzberg and calling for zero-tolerance police tactics (in de Certeau's terms: strategies?), on the other hand there is a reformatory discourse defining ways of integration. Interestingly, this discourse developed the idea of urban management making use of the notion of locality: it is viewed not as a resource for alternative politics, but for the assimilation of the district. Where the exclusionary discourse only defines Kreuzberg as "other", the reformatory discourse (as demonstrated in Senatsverwaltung...1998) reaches further into Kreuzberg. It establishes boundaries between different Kreuzbergs: one that needs to be improved and one that needs to be guarded.

On the other side of the defining power, the Kreuzbergers (inhabitants of Kreuzberg) have to position themselves towards the stigma. Some apply evasive tactics. They side with the dominant discourse and project the stigma onto the neighbourhood. They shift the blame on other "Others", be they defined by locality, ethnicity, age, etc. A second practice is one of flight: people detach themselves from the label "Kreuzberg", blame all Kreuzbergers and leave not only the symbolic definition, but move away from the quarter. The third practice is the embrace of the stigma and the boundary definitions, combined with a turnaround in the valuation of the inscriptions. (1) A sharp line between "us" (the ghetto-youth) and "others" (those who live outside the ghetto) is drawn, (2) a feeling of being "street-wise" is contrasted to the unease of the "others" towards the ghetto, and thus (3), a connection with a territory of belonging is established. More politically oriented youth ally behind the category of "Kanak", declaring themselves to be those excluded and drawing political consciousness out of this.

III

St. Pauli and its main street, the Reeperbahn, is likely the only quarter of Hamburg you know by name. It is internationally known as *the* centre of sexualised entertainment and night-life, including phenomena such as a high crime-rate. But next to this image of bright lights and dark corners it has at least two more: like Kreuzberg, it was used as an inner-urban periphery, whose rotten houses were rented out to migrants in the late sixties. Hence, it is regarded as a so-called multicultural area. Besides, St. Pauli is known as a place of political resistance, where squatters fought (successfully!) for the maintenance not only of single houses but the entire 'Hafenstrasse' in the eighties (Manos 1989).

On the one hand all these images lead to stigmatisation and sometimes-efficient exclusion by a discourse that bounds the inhabitants to their 'deviant' place. But on the other hand the people of the St. Pauli realised their position as one on the edge. A 'sense of place', of spatial belonging, a collective spatial identity arose from this counter-position that aims to resist the urban politics (of Hamburg) as well as against exclusionary practices in general and to create an 'alternative open space' for themselves. Although this spatial identity is not homogenous because its political references and alliances are subject to ongoing changes, it draws back on one localised culture.

On the surface, this space might be labelled a Foucauldian 'other space' since it is a heterogeneous one, formed by the heterogeneity of its inhabitants, with boundaries against the surrounding places. This awareness of being deviant, a critical spatial identity that rests on being in opposition, a

counter-site, a place of resistance is - unlike Kreuzberg - not (yet) opposed by a reformatory discourse on the other. But it also leads to a reversal: the 'Other'-Stigma is turned into a consciousness and made proud of *being* Other.

At a first glance this heterogeneous, but collective spatial identity in St. Pauli leads to a more or less fixed community that fights enthusiastically against 'the rest'. Simultaneously, this case reveals the mechanisms, which the construction of identity follows: Again, this spatial identity is a *bounded* one, which is to say that it constructs an inside and an outside, an 'us' versus a 'them'. Identities are constructed through counter-positions. In the beginning, this position might be critical because it fights against stigmatisation and exclusion but too easily it turns exclusionary itself and can be criticised because of its tendency to be fixed and essential.

IV

In post-structuralist theory, the critical spatial identity approach recognises the *relationship between* us and them (instead of a boundary), the interrelation through which identities are constructed (while bounded identities are formed by and form exclusion). Because these interrelations are never egalitarian we have to recognise that they are power-relations. Social powers constructing difference(s) are constructed against and through an oppositional moment: Any 'us' is always constituted by elements of the oppositional 'them' that enables the formulation of the 'us'. Drawing on Derrida's concept of the 'constitutive outside' wherein "[t]he elements of signification function not through the compact force of their nuclei but rather through the networks of oppositions that distinguishes them and then relates them one to another." (Derrida 1991:63) Moreover, "the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. [E]very concept is inscribed (...) in a system within which it refers to the other" (ibid.). And finally: "[T]he subject becomes a *signifying* subject only by inscribing itself in the system of differences." (ibid., p. 68)

If we try to apply this argument for the critical spatial identities in Kreuzberg and St. Pauli we have to acknowledge the multiple constitutions of inside/rs and outside/rs. In St. Pauli, the positioning as deviant place is clearly a product of (at least two) opposing groups with different spatial interpretations. The definition made by the urban government rests on the distinction in 'normality' and 'deviance', whereas the inhabitants position themselves (and their place) as 'radical' and this heterogeneous radicalism serve as basis for political alliances that compete for space.

Kreuzberg displays similar features in its ambivalent mythology. Kreuzberg as poor, criminal, foreign place is an important source of justification for urban politics of all kinds. These urban politics are capable of expropriating ideas that were used by the Kreuzbergers to form pressure groups - but by constructing ghetto-images, the dominant discourses deliver new categories which are in turn reinterpreted by (some) Kreuzbergers.

In both cases, there is not a single almighty disciplinary power. The "other places" are at the same time defined by several sides, but are also the territory on which each side contests, reinterprets and

recreates the other's definitions. All parties involved employ essentialisms as well as demonstrate in many of their actions that they are aware of the strategic or tactic character of these essentialisms.

The connection with utopia, to refer to Foucault and Lefèbvre again, is another interesting point. Evidently, there is not a single utopia that the people in Berlin, Hamburg, St. Pauli and Kreuzberg strive for. Instead, utopia can be constructed according to the self-image and related to the other-image. In Berlin's reformatory discourse, an utopia is envisioned as the direction in which Kreuzberg has to develop. In St. Pauli, the idea of multiculturalism serves as utopia against urban restructuring. St. Pauli without Hamburg, Kreuzberg without Berlin - no, both parts of heterotopia and isotopia are densely intertwined.

To be critical of spatial identity, to avoid processes of exclusion and inclusion by rebuilding boundaries, requires bearing in mind that space and identity are products of relations. The concepts of Foucault, Lefèbvre and de Certeau assume the existence of only one overarching power structure. Whereas others (e.g. Doreen Massey) draw less attention towards a rigid hierarchy than towards multiplicity to emphasise the diversity of power(s) (1), the mutual construction of space and multiplicity (2) and finally the recognition of multiplicity as bedrock for social change (Massey 1999: 28ff).

V

To conclude: Why did we take the way of space, if what we are aiming at is identity? We are concerned about the interdependence of space and identity. We can see this interdependence only in terms of practices applying definitions of space through identity and identity through space, in different forms of the relation of space and society, deeply imbedded in a web of relations.

As the theoretical introduction has shown, the dilemma remains: If a concept is based on a single disciplinary power, opposition has no resources, nor a territory. Difference, if defined relationally, can never escape the web of power. If social change is grasped in terms of opposing powers and ideas, a concept of located oppositions becomes evident but the fixedness remains and essentialism must be criticised.

In either way, exclusion and inclusion operate, oppositional movements can control places as well, which does not deny the relation and interdependence with the other side. A counter-place can also become subject to tactics of the dominant power, incorporating and changing it. The quest for an alternative code cannot be successful in this complexity of relations: the permanent recognition and affirmation of the other's definitions does not promise revolution.

Sticking to Foucault's heterotopias we refer again to the idea that *any* place could be deviant, 'other'. Undoubtedly this depends on who defines 'norm and aberrance' - but this is the crucial point: because the ability of definition is inextricably linked to (social) power. If we are able to acknowledge multiplicity and diversity *in practice*, there could be many *tactics*, even in space!

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