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## **Chapter Eight**

### **The Future of Public Space: Crisis and Renewal**

In this chapter I am interested in exploring the contemporary transformation of public space. Space has been transformed in fundamental ways today. Cyberspace, more than anything else, has radically transformed how we consider space. The digital world is not only a new kind of space, but has transformed non-digital space. The question this chapter is addressed to is whether the traditional understanding of public space is now in decline and exhausted of potential both for public life and for the social life of cities and, if instead, new forms of space are emerging that require a rethinking of the meaning of the public.<sup>i</sup> On the one side, new kinds of digital and post-urban space bring about a transformation in the relation of the citizen to society; on the other side, these new kinds of space present major challenges to traditional understandings of public life in that they can offer cosmopolitan possibilities as well as dangers.

The western urban tradition was based on the centrality of public space: the square, the street, the commons made possible civic life, community and fostered democracy. This was also the tradition that inspired the related notion of the public sphere, a key concept in critical theory since Habermas, introduced it in his first major work. However, in recent years there has been a major transformation of public space as a result of developments, such as neo-liberal commodification, globalisation, securitisation, and digitalisation. There is a greater pluralisation of public space – as opposed to a shared space – and concomitant rise of interstitial and global space. But, the spectre of dystopia also haunts our time as our cities lose their connection with community. Against the utopia of Habermas's deliberative model of the public sphere, Foucault's ambivalent notion of the *Heterotopia* – places that are different from the mainstream – captures elements of the contemporary transformation of space. Public space was once based on proximity, the model of dialogue, and commonality between strangers; today it is pluralised but does not foster a culture of pluralism. The central motif of voice in the making of the modern city, has been replaced by the motif of the eye.

In this chapter, I argue that while the historical forms of public space and the legacy of the *Agora* have lost much of their relevance, they have not entirely disappeared and can acquire other functions. New kinds of public space have indeed emerged but have not entirely replaced the old forms, even if many of its functions have been rendered redundant.<sup>ii</sup> The contemporary crisis has much to do with the decline of the old and the incomplete appearance of the new. Rather than strangers encountering each other in the shared public culture, different groups create their own publics. Yet, public space is still part of the fabric of society and perhaps is best seen in terms of changing social configurations. If space is defined by social relations and the uses that people make of it, it is therefore a matter of changing forms than a question of decline. Public space is ultimately created by the significations that people give to it and, as suggested also by Habermas's notion of the public sphere, it is indeterminate and unbounded. However, it is not disembodied and exists in material and highly mediatized forms. But the role of public space today is less central to the public sphere that it once was and perhaps its real function today is social rather than political.

### **Space and the Public**

The modern understanding of the public has been closely linked to space and in particular to urban space. Cities are spatial zones that are unlike other spatial configurations, such as the nation-state, in that they have always had a stronger connection with the idea of the public. This at least was the basis of the western tradition of the city. The first colonies the Greeks established where all cities and reflected the urban form of the home polis that they sought to replicate in the conquered lands on the shores of the Mediterranean. The Spanish built cities in the New World in much the same way as the ones of the Old World, with the central square and other markers of public life. The Brazilian tradition perhaps signals a break from that European tradition. The foundation of Brasilia in 1960 as the utopian new capital was to be a city without public space as traditionally understood based on an urban centre.<sup>iii</sup> But even in this case, forms of public space did take shape, contrary to the programmatic designs of its founders. The very notion of citizenship in modern times was generally seen as pertaining to cities. Public space and public life have been seen as interwoven since the Greek polis. The legacy of the *Agora* – the free and open space of the city – connects Athens to Rome to Florence in the heritage of the European city of modernity. The modern city inherited the classical understanding of space as the location of public life, but also, as Walter Benjamin (2002) showed in the monumental *Arcades* work, made it the work of memory, since much of

the present knows itself only in the memory of that which has been lost. Modernity created a discord between the idea of the city and the reality of modern capitalism.

The quintessential spatial markers of the modern city – above all the square, the street/street life, the park, markets, promenades, public gardens, the commons – are spatial categories. Modern institutions, such as libraries, public parks, town halls, etc, inherited the spatiality and materiality of the older legacy of public life as expressed in public spaces. The very notion of public space is by definition a contrast to private space and as such captured the escape from the tyranny of the home. The truly free life was to be found in the public domain. The institution of the café since the eighteenth century in European cities cultivated a new kind of public life that also has a political function as a space free of power. Public space makes possible civic autonomy and is the social and material basis of democracy.

In his 1962 work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas characterised the early public sphere in its formative period in the eighteenth century as a domain of communication that was linked to new public spaces, which were reducible neither to the Court Society nor to the private world of domesticity. It is of course important to note that Habermas's concept of the public sphere was not primarily a spatial one and the debate on the public sphere in social theory has not been primarily a debate about public space, which has developed into a different body of literature. The German term *Öffentlichkeit* does not correspond to the notion of space as such and Habermas's concern was not with space as such but with the critical formation of public opinion. The public sphere is a realm of discourse signifying publicness and includes normative elements that are in contradiction to historical reality. Nonetheless, the public sphere is not disembodied; it is based on particular forms of space and the institutions and modes of interaction that they fostered.

While Habermas emphasised communication – in the sense of debate and political contestation based on the emergence of a reading public – as the chief feature of the newly created bourgeois public culture, other more critical perspectives have related it to the space of resistance and social struggles for which the categories of the bourgeois public sphere were less important (see Landes, 1988, Calhoun et al 1992, Negt and Kluge 2011, Tucker 1996, Warner 2002). The age of revolution may have seen the decline of the eighteenth century bourgeois public sphere associated with Enlightenment culture, as Habermas argued, due to the rise of capitalism and the commodification of the public sphere. However, it also

witnessed the creation of new cultural and political movements that were also shaped in the crucible of public space in the modern city. So, on the one side, modern public space becomes the basis of civic life, democracy, recreation and community and, at the same time, makes possible political radicalness. It is the space of cosmopolitical engagement, where the encounter of the citizen and the stranger opens citizenship to the culture of modernity, which as Benjamin recognised is never contained in fixed structures, such as the glass and steel of the Parisian arcades or the Boulevards designed by Haussmann to restrict and control public protests (see Benjamin 1997, 2002).

While Benjamin's reflections on public space capture the ambivalence of modern public space, the dominant story is one of decline. The space of modernity became dominated by the great projects of the modern national state, as in the Haussmann project for the redesign of Paris, great exhibitions, iconic public spaces designed to celebrate the state and often empire. The example of modernist twentieth century Brasilia is an extreme case of this drive for the perfectly planned city. Modern space is dominated by the culture of monumentality and capitalist commodification at the same time as it opens itself to something that reaches beyond the new culture of materiality of the nineteenth century. In his account of the phantasmagoria of modernity, Benjamin tried to capture such moments of the modern metropolis, which he saw in the combination of modern technological innovation, bourgeois life, and modernism. As a result, the modern city is also the graveyard of history since it is composed of ruins but also sustained by their memories. Habermas, like Arendt in the *Human Condition*, but following Adorno and Horkheimer saw the modern public sphere in terminal decline, although this should not be interpreted as nostalgia for a lost reality since the public sphere can be recreated in new forms. In fact, this early work was intended to be an exercise in immanent critique designed to show how the ideas of bourgeois society are not realised in social reality. However, unlike Arendt (1958), in his later work he revised, if not abandoned, what was nonetheless a historical narrative of decline for a theory of collective learning that offered a less historically based model of immanent analysis (see Chapter One). This sense of modern public space as in decline, eroded by the institutions of modernity and capitalism, was also a theme in Richard Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man*, a work that portrayed the fall of public life with the rise of a privatistic sphere based on narcissism and 'the tyranny of intimacy' (Sennett 1978). In this account, public life as become a place of fear and is depoliticized. However, Sennett's later work on the re-humanization of the city

reflected a more forward looking view of the possibility of the open city as a place where people can autonomous lives.

In the writings of Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin, the modern city makes possible a specific kind of intensified experience in which relations of proximity alternate with relations of distance. In his famous essay of 1903 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', Simmel (1972) referred to this as a nervousness. Metropolitan experience encapsulates the spirit of modernity, especially the sense of things being in flux and fluid (see Gilloch 1997, Frisby 1986, 2001). The city is characterised by the money economy, exchange and circulation, which produce new sensations and cultural representations or images. Modern urban experience is shaped by motion, which tends to lead to a fragmentation of what might once have been a more holistic experience of the world. The urban crowd, street life, mechanical transportation intensified the inner life of individuals who react in different ways to the stimuli of the city. In the writings of both Simmel and Benjamin, with their respective concerns with Berlin and Paris, the modern metropolis offers the individual possibilities of liberty and creativity that would otherwise not be possible. Influenced by Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer, one of the early Frankfurt School theorists and close to Adorno, wrote in a similar vein about the modern city but gave greater centrality to the critique of capitalism. Common to these interpretations of the modern city was a sense of public space as a domain in which new experiences could be forged. In the writings of Simmel and, especially, Benjamin the city is an essentially open space, which has a material reality but one that is inseparable from its cultural forms and the social relations. For Simmel, the key category was the idea of sociability: the city as the space of social relations. Both authors saw the modern city as marked by the dynamics of the crowd and not primarily as a basis of political community. Their critique of modernity was more of an aesthetic critique than a straightforwardly political one.

The reception of Simmel's work in twentieth century sociology, above all in the United States, led to a conception of modern society based on the form of the city. Max Weber also saw the city as formative of modern society more generally. In this sociological tradition, space is seen in terms of social relations. The work of Henri Lefebvre developed this perspective on space as a social category with a more elaborate critical theory of the social production of space. For the purposes of this chapter, the important point is that public space should be seen as a social category as a space of relations and is therefore not fixed in a

specific form. In the Frankfurt School critical theory tradition, Benjamin came closest to this position in that he saw the spatial categories of the modern metropolis as the basis of new kinds of experience and remembering. Benjamin's reflections on the city offered the additional and important perspective that a city is not based only on people, but has a certain materiality in its conditions of existence. The modern metropolis is a product of the interaction of people and technological and material creations that all together give it its vibrancy. This perspective is somewhat lost in later accounts, such as Habermas's purely deliberative vision of the modernity.

### **The Transformation of Public Space**

There is much to suggest that the presuppositions of the conception of public space in critical theory as discussed in the foregoing are undermined, if not invalidated, by the transformation of capitalism in the past three or four decades. There is also the further question of the relationship between public space and, as in Habermas's conception, the public sphere as a realm of communication between strangers. It is clear that today the public sphere is no longer rooted in public space; it has found other modalities of existence. While the public sphere has not been entirely disembodied, it has ceased to be a spatial category. Where, then, does public space reside and why should it be cultivated?

To begin, public space is no longer necessarily confined only to urban locations. The modern city inherited the basic structure of the ancient city in having a centre that was the focus of public life. The relation between centre and periphery in cities has now changed the spatiality of the city. There are new sites of space that lie beyond the bounded space of the historical cities of Europe. These sites would include Refugee camps, which are not public spaces but spaces of confinement that are also sites of dwelling for many people where they often seek to preserve the life of the spaces they left behind. Many large cities have peripheries that are disconnected with the urban centres and in many cities, especially in North America and in Latin America, the centres have often become empty of civic life. In some cases, the social life of the city is maintained precisely by ensuring that it is disconnected from the periphery. This is illustrated by the way the centre of Brasilia has limited public transport to the satellite towns around it to ensure that the poor people who service the needs of the city on week days do not come to the city for recreation on Sundays. The upper class district of Higienopolis in Sao Paula does not have a metro line so that poor people will not spoil the urban tranquillity of its residents. While many cities have reversed the descent into urban decay, they have

become beholden to empty or pseudo-public space. Much of this has come about as a result of post-industrialization, which in destroying the modernist city that was the focus of the writing of Simmel and Benjamin created forms of public space that are not designed to foster public life. Thus, one finds in the centre of many cities new kinds of urban spaces created by artists but devoid of lived life. Re-gentrification reverses some trends but brings about others, such as dispossession and fragmentation. A more general trend toward post-urban space can be found with the creation of recreational zones outside the city and, of course, that creation of the post-1945 era, middle class suburbia.

Public space is defined to a large degree by reference to private space. It follows that changes in the private domain will have consequences for public space. Such transformations have become more important than in the first half of the twentieth century. New kind of private space have emerged to replace much of what was once took place in public. The private realm cannot any longer be seen in terms of a tyranny from which the only escape was the public domain, which was clearly how Walter Benjamin saw things. There new kinds of autonomous private space that offers the individual the liberty once could only be found in public space. While this has led to a decline in communal life, it has clearly shifted the balance in the relation between the private and the public, producing more hybrid forms. However, the changed relationship has also taken more insipient forms with the undermining of the old forms of public space by the private domain.

With the ascent of neoliberalism, the demise of a certain tradition of the public was inevitable. The fundamental rationale of neoliberalism is the onslaught on public life. The valorization of the market and a more expansive and aggressive capitalism has led to the citizen becoming a consumer who is immunized from the experiences of phantasmagoria that Benjamin described as part of the experience of city life. Over the past few decades in almost every part of the world there is clear evidence of growing privatization of public space. Public space is no longer composed of democratic spaces but sites of consumption and control (Low and Smith 2005). Neoliberal commodification is perhaps exemplified in the shopping mall and the golf course.

Much of what is regarded as public space is often not so public. A recent trend in the United States is POPS, or privately-owned public space. A famous example, which was where the Occupy Wall Street movement began in 2011, is what is now Zuccotti Park, which is owned

by a corporation. Other historical examples are a reminder that much of public space has always been private, as is illustrated by Hyde Park, London, which as with many other public parks is owned by the crown. Many shopping centres exercise their property rights to impose their rules on what can be 'public', for example banning people wearing hoods. Permission has to be sought for protests outside Westminster, the British parliament. In many European cities there is today a concern with Muslim headscarf, and especially the Burka, with demands for banning Burkas in public space and a more general ban on headscarves in the public domain. Clearly clothing – which both conceals and reveals – the body has always had a certain signification in public space. In the case of the Burka, which requires the total concealment of the body, it has led to demands that the human face cannot be concealed in the public domain. There is an interesting tension with this requirement for the visibility of the face and the theme of anonymity that has traditionally characterised the modern city. However, as far as I know, an item of female clothing has not before been connected with security.

Public space nonetheless has always been an area of securitization. This, as mentioned, was the driving force behind the Haussmann design of Paris, following the Paris Commune uprising in 1871. Recent developments in relation to terror have led to new regimes of securitization and policing that have had a detrimental effect on public space in many cities. Much of this goes along with the expansion in private space. As Sennett argued, in *The Fall of Public Life*, public life has become an area of anxiety rather than a shared space. Notwithstanding these developments, it should be noted modernity has always been accompanied by such concerns with the control of population and the regulation of space. The ordering of space and the ordering of societies have been coeval. The extent to which this all to be seen in terms of domination is questionable. The commodification of public space is ambivalent in that it represents on, on the one side, the demise of the older forms of space, while, on the other side, it reverses the urban decay following from de-industrialization and re-introduces conviviality. This ambivalence is perhaps best seen in terms of re-gentrification: large swathes of city life have been saved from stagnation if not decay at the cost of a loss in the older organisation of space. The gated community, to take a different but similar example, is also ambivalent. The phenomenon of gating takes many forms, from hard to soft forms (see Baneen and Uduku 2015). It is also not entirely a creation of neoliberal times: the medieval cities of Europe were mostly been gated in some form or another and it was this particular form of the organisation of space that gave them their autonomy.



Clearly one of the most important transformations in public space in recent times is digital space, which often intersects with the older forms of space and may even replace them in certain contexts. It is predicated on private space, even making possible new kinds of public life, since it is mostly individuals as private persons who connect in virtual space. In the age of YouTube and Facebook, space is no longer local or necessarily based on place. Such kinds of space are both public and private. Much of the digital space is a market place, but is accessed from the private sphere, which increasingly enters into cyberspace. The screen replaces the plaza. Digital space creates new kinds of communities, but also brings about new kinds of exclusion. Facebook Marketplace, for example, is owned privately and serves simultaneously to include/exclude people. Those who do not engage with the digital are simply excluded, while those who share the same digital space are included.

The arrival of the smart mobile phone has fundamentally transformed the nature of space. The social theory of modernity emphasised the fleeting and momentary nature of modern urban life, as famously captured in Baudelaire's understanding of modernity as 'the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent'.<sup>iv</sup> The mobile phone has made permanent what was once of the moment (see Greenfield 2017). One's location is recorded by the phone's technology; phone networks capture every movement and transaction of the user. The photographs that the user now takes with ease, whether as a tourist or consumer, retain a memory of what was once a fleeting moment. The stroller is more often than not connected to a mobile device rather than to the physical reality of the street, which is traversed with the aid of an on-line map. The iconic feature of modern urban public space, the phone booth, has now lost its function. Instagram is another example of a significant transformation in how we see space. The dominance of Instagram has also now implications for architecture.<sup>v</sup>

These developments are of course a feature of the big city. Large cities are now intensively networked spaces, which have the effect of bringing about an increased intensification in social relations. According to Paul Mason, the injection of networked technologies into big cities and the resulting intensification in social relations produces a new contrast between the big city and the small town.<sup>vi</sup> Arguably this distinction has replaced the older one of urban versus rural. This comes at a time when more than a half of the world's population live in cities. In this context the novelty of the city is no longer marked by a contrast to countryside

but by urban transformations that create very different kinds of cities, for example liveable cities as opposed to fortress cities.

According to Castells (1997), flows do not create new kinds of place but replace place. Technology has made private and public space less demarcated and has opened up alternative possibilities for spatial experience that not contained within the urban form. This radical turn to the post-urban is also reflected in the making of public space as something that is necessarily in the outside: it can also be found indoors, as in new architectural designs that have transformed building such as museums where spatial experience facilitates changes in self-understanding. Post-urban public space is by no means regressive or a sign of total reification; it can rise to new kinds of experiences leading to the enhancement of the social life of cities and possibly can make possible new forms of public life. Such transformation in experience are also part of a more general linguistic and cognitive transformation in that the digital world serves a new spatial language: terms that were previously material are now purely digital, for example 'storage', 'sharing', 'access', 'open access', 'mining' etc.

Public space is no longer local or even urban but is intermeshed with global flows. The increasing presence of social media through mobile devices has created new transnational spaces that enable greater reflexivity and cultural fluidity. There are numerous modes of mediatized interaction in contemporary public spaces across national borders that express new global flows. New kinds of digital technology make possible transnational space within the context of what was once only local space. Examples range from the instantaneous access to social media that most people have through their mobile phones to the ambient screens that are increasingly a feature of city centres and modes of surveillance (Papastergiadis 2016; De Sousa 2012). In view of these developments, it is difficult to disagree with Ash Amin in an insightful essay that human dynamics in public space are centrally influenced by the entanglement and circulation of human and non-human bodies. He argues that sociality in urban public space is not a sufficient condition for civic and political citizenship' (Amin 2008: 7). His post-humanist perspective stresses the importance of technology and material infrastructure as an intrinsic part of the urban and human condition, that is to say, the social life of the city cannot be seen only in terms of individuals interacting with each other. Such forms of interaction are mediated by technology, such that technology is also an active agent in the construction of social realities. An example of the technologization of social relations can be found in digital cartography, which is having an increasing impact on space.

GoogleMaps requires companies to pay for adverts. One will not know about a café or restaurant unless it has paid to be on Google maps as a priority location. This is not only a new approach to mapping, but directly impacts on everyday life. The eventual arrival of the driverless car will be an additional step in the entanglement of technology and cartography in creating ways people navigate urban space.

Digital technology is just one expression of technological change. John Urry has commented on the push for verticality in current futuristic cities, such as Shanghai, Dubai, Qatar, Hong Kong, Rio, Sao Paulo, Seoul and Singapore (Urry 2016: 138-40). The space above the surface of cities is becoming more and more important. As a result helicopters become increasingly common, especially in Sao Paulo. Urry claims micro-light flying will become more a feature of the 'fast mobility city' of the future. Currently Amazon is experimenting with automated drones for the delivery of packages.

### **The Rise of the *Heterotopia*? Towards Cosmopolitan Space**

How then are we to understand the contemporary transformation of urban space? Does it signal the end of the kind of space that was the basis of the European city? Or could such interstitial forms of space be the basis of cosmopolitan space?

The interstitial notion of space is reflected in Foucault's notion of heterotopia. The concept of *Heterotopia*, meaning literally 'other spaces,' is one of the more interesting ways to interpret the current transformation of space and the creation of locations that are not spaces as conventionally understood. In his 1967 text, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', Foucault wrote that in contrast to the great obsession of the nineteenth century with history: 'The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space' and, he wrote, that 'the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time' (Foucault 1984). The enigmatic and obscure text characterised the present time as a moment 'when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein'. His argument that space takes the 'form of relations among sites' is not too far away from the sociological notion of social reality as relational, as put forward by Simmel among others. But the Heterotopia is not only a domain of social interaction; it is underpinned by materiality.

Heterotopias are a contrast to utopias in that they are real places that exist, often at the margins of societies or the margins of cities. They are counter-sites and are varied (Foucault distinguishes between crisis and deviant heterotopias) and there can be a juxtaposition of several incompatible sites. Foucault drew attention to an aspect of space that did not figure in the earlier accounts, namely a plural sense of space. Nonetheless, the notion of heterotopias is not entirely foreign to critical theory in that it has some similarities with Benjamin's characterization of the diffuseness of urban life and possibility of something different (see Dehaena and De Caeter 2001). For Hetherington, they are 'spaces of alternative ordering', where things are done differently than in their surroundings (Hetherington 1992).

Foucault's essay was unclear and suggestive, but it did not have a clear political sense of heterotopias as ways of organizing space. He had in mind examples as diverse as cemeteries, brothels, boarding schools, even colonies. The notion of the heterotopia – at least in terms of its reception – opens up new ways of thinking about spaces for dwelling, living, and encounters. The concept is relevant to the contemporary interest in cosmopolitan space, for example, migrant spaces. One of the major challenges for European societies is the integration of minorities. To achieve this, it has increasingly been recognized that new kinds of interactive space need to be created that facilitate interaction between migrants/refugees and citizens. Many migrant groups cross, inhabit, or complicate the borderlands of Europe: some of these are literal borders, others are those interstitial liminal spaces (such as the securitised zone of Ceuta and the camps in Malta) where international law makes new kinds of citizens, ones not granted full rights. Such spaces are as much a part of the making of European public space. In 2015, during a time of unprecedented migration into Europe, public space took on a new significance in several European cities, including schools in Athens used as homes for migrants and tents in public spaces in German cities in the summer of 2015. The physical presence of refugees in cities in Germany, particularly their arrival at the train stations led to what has been called, *Willkommenskultur*. Clearly, such uses of public space are not a basis for the future in that they are responses to crisis. A challenge for Europe is to create spaces of inclusivity for migrants that are more durable and a basis for inclusion and autonomy.

Other examples of cosmopolitan heterotopias would include new and often ephemeral uses of public space, such as festivals, which have become key cultural players in contemporary transformations. It is also possible to speak of radical youth heterotopias. The experience of squatting (*okupas*) and the construction of squatter identity in Europe is a manifestation of the

transformation in the way that the public, the private, and the collective are reconfigured in contemporary Europe. The phenomenon of squatting in European cities is an example of a radicalized notion of the public and the need to re-think the limits of the private. Other examples would include movement-parties such as *Podemos* in Spain, which emerged out of the transformations in the use of public spaces. Such protest movements can empower their protagonists and reinvigorate democracy through the creation of meaningful forms of participation and public engagement. The significant development is the emergence of, what can be called, spaces of engagement whereby public space becomes a location of transformations in self-understanding by making possible new experiences.

The question of public space is not only a question of the transformation of space. The public itself is no longer only the national citizenry, but includes others who are disenfranchised (migrants, refugees, youth). In this sense the public includes counter-publics. As noted, the large influx of refugees into Europe in the past few years has made its impact on public space.

Many of these developments cannot be understood only in the terms of the reification of public space or the loss of something – the agora – once possessed. They should be seen as expressions of public engagement and the making of embodied cosmopolitan experiences (see Rumford 2011). Space is not something territorially fixed but, following the philosophy of Castoriadis (1987), has an imaginary dimension that gives to it creative – and what he called its ‘instituting’ – possibilities. Public space is ultimately created by the significations that people give to it and is indeterminate. It is evident that today these significations are rapidly changing. Such spaces are cosmopolitan in the sense that they are not only driven by people that themselves have experienced a transnational life, but above all because they enlarge the moral and political horizons of citizens. Cosmopolitan space refers to how majority cultures open themselves up to other forms of space-making (see Rumford 2011). The opening up of such forms of space should be seen as part of growing cosmopolitan trends in contemporary societies. Such trends are of course ambiguous in that they are not entirely new and they produce counter-movements, as is clearly illustrated by the surge of different kinds of populism across Europe.

It is possible to imagine in the not too distant future an entirely new and radical transformation of rural space. Under the condition of a new politics of the Anthropocene, new

uses will have to be found for the large expanses of space devoted to environmentally destructive dairy farming, as well as other kinds of farming. If such a transformation of space were to occur, it would have major implications for public space.

At this point, a general argument can be formulated. Public space was once based on proximity, the model of dialogue, and the promise of commonality; in the classical and modern European city, it had a close connection with public life. Or put differently, public life was once based on public space and thus had a close connection with the making of cities. Today public space is to a far greater degree pluralised and a site of difference. Rather than similar people encountering each other, diverse people construct their own ‘publics’. Increasingly digital algorithms serve people with the content they desire and thus present less difference than sameness. The digitalization of the public creates a new kind of segmented kind of public space. Thus, while society as a whole may be becoming more diverse, digital space rather than expanding the horizons of cyber communities, tends to strength social media silos whereby communities stick to their own ‘bubbles’. In the developing world, this is underpinned by a much stronger divide between the various classes and the spaces that they can access.

We can speak of a shift in the category of the public person from a citizen to a stranger. It is only within digital communities that a restricted kind of community of strangers is possible. Public space was once bounded, but is now unbounded. However, this unbounded space makes possible new borders and exclusions. It is also reorganized as a result of tremendous material and technological transformations in the organization of cities. This transformation of space presents both dangers and opportunities for cities and for public life.

### **Mourning and Sorrow in Public Space**

Public space has always been a place of collective remembrance, sites where public displays of memory are enacted. The performative function of public space is still relevant today and can be seen in new forms of commemoration. James E. Young in a classic essay in 1992 referred to the rise of the counter-memorial, or as it is sometimes called the ‘counter-monument’ (from the German, *Gegendenkmal*). This idea, which recalls Foucault’s notion of counter-memories, relates to the ways in which previously excluded peoples – mostly minorities – affirm and insert themselves into national or mainstream narratives by subverting

or challenges the official or unexamined taken for granted heritage. Such acts of commemoration are reflected in the shift from the monument (to the hero or victor) to the anti-monumental memorial. With this comes a greater recognition of the dark side of history and the need for the present to atone for the crimes of the past, as well as for the victim to have a voice.

Now, while memorials have been erected to the memories of the fallen soldier, especially since 1918, they have now been opened up to a wider sphere of experiences for all kinds of groups and take less the form of the heroic commemoration of, for example, sacrifice for the nation, for king and country. It has led cultural heritage into the difficult waters of contested histories and traumas, since the hero and the victim are often not so easily separated: the victim may be a perpetrator in the eyes of a previously silenced group. Those who made great sacrifices may have not have done so for a noble cause (see Chapter 10).

The broadening of the scope of the memorial along with the wider democratisation of memory has given to cultural heritage a new and more cosmopolitan task. Instead of being a celebration of a past now in ruins, it is now more likely to be a reflection on atonement, mourning and grief. It is possible that only such sentiments are all that can unite what are often deeply divided societies today. All that is left of universal values is sorrow, loss and remorse (this topic will be discussed in relation to memory in the next Chapter).

In these very much changed circumstances, in highly pluralized societies in which everyone is a stranger, cultural heritage can no longer so easily create unity for a nation or community. Instead, its task is to offer ways for the political community to live with the past and find in the figure of the stranger new and more positive ways of being. To do so will also be a way of reconciling the often difficult work of remembrance with the task of cultural regeneration. Cultural heritage is now being defined in new contexts in which atonement, sorrow, mourning and grief become the markers by which the present is expressed through a more critical response to the past. The new sites of remembrance are less concerned about representation, since often there is nothing left to represent but absence, pain and suffering. Since the 9/11<sup>th</sup> memorial in New York, this has set a new trend that goes back to 2001 with Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin (see Young 2016, Walkowitz and Knauer (2004).

Such acts of signification are re-shaping public space and have given local communities new ways of expressing their histories. For example, there has been a notable change in abstract designs in spatial memorials, which are also now designed to enhance active participation and dialogue so that the viewer is no longer a passive spectator. The space of experience is enlarged to make possible new and often more personal interpretations. As Quentin Stevens and Karen Franck (2016) show, abstract designs encourage remembrance in ways that encourage the viewer to look inwards, not outwards. Instead of awe and distance, they cultivate a more direct experience that requires interpretation.

Cultural heritage can take a variety of more cosmopolitan forms when it is reclaimed by those previously excluded or marginalised, such as migrant or ethnic communities, national minorities, or those, such as youth groups, who have not been able to articulate their identities around the dominant narratives. Public space can thus be reclaimed and made more relevant for cultural regeneration without presuming a common culture or nostalgia for monumentality. There is also no reason why it should be the space of the nation, but the space of forms of community and for the pursuit of the good life.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the historical forms of public space have lost much of their relevance. While the spectre of dystopia haunts the very vision of the city today, the historical forms have not entirely disappeared. The contemporary crisis has much to do with the decline of the old and the incomplete appearance of the new. New kinds of public space have emerged, but have not replaced the old forms, which lose their function as the container of the public sphere. Political movements, power etc no longer depends on public space. As the public moves into other domains, public space is still a key dimension of the social life of the city. Invoking Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, there is today a greater pluralisation of public space and interstitial space. The impact of mobility in relation to communal life and sociality has also changed the nature of public space, giving it different material forms. A critical perspective on public space today should not be nostalgic for the past of the European city nor should it see only dystopia in the ruins of the present. There is an urgent need for a new political imagination for the creation of more relevant forms of public space.

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## Notes

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<sup>ii</sup> For some general perspectives, see Innerarity (2006), Madaninipour (2013), Low (2000), Low and Smith (2005), Tonkiss 2005).

<sup>iii</sup> Brasilia was designed in the shape of an aeroplane. See Holston (1989).

<sup>iv</sup> Baudelaire (1964: 13).

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/nov/23/snapping-point-how-the-worlds-leading-architects-fell-under-the-instagram-spell>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.socialeurope.eu/to-the-postcapitalist-city>

