diversity and fragmentation on the other. Drawing primarily on personal observations, the essay examines the flow of social, economic, political and cultural models between the Middle East and North America in order to better understand the forces connected to cross-border homogenisation and their role as creators of both similarity and difference in the built environment.

Arijit Sen approaches the issue of homogenisation from the perspective of architectural design, urbanism and the concept of cultural landscape. His chapter explores 21st century ethnic and immigrant landscapes, and argues that the homogeneity of representation of ethnic spaces across the world can be conceived of as resulting from forces of globalisation and the commoditisation of ethnic objects, signs and symbols. However, he argues that despite the banality of these spaces, they represent places where immigrants sustain their social and cultural life, and are important nodes within a large and globally dispersed transnational ethnic network. Using the example of the cultural landscape of South Asian communities on a street in Chicago, Sen’s paper suggests a methodological strategy and analytical frame which provides a way to identify and evaluate quotidian architecture and lived environments, and allow us to look beyond the narrow homogenising tendencies in the built environment and their impact on the lived environment.

The next chapter takes the form of a commentary presented at the Knowledge Construction workshop by distinguished urban geographer Edward Soja. His paper argues that accompanying the accelerated globalisation of capital and labour over the past forty years there has been the diffusion of a particular belief system or ‘global culture’, associated with a broadly definable neoliberal capitalism, which has had a certain homogenising effect. He notes that it is easy to identify a repetitive sameness in architectural features in nearly all the world’s major cities, which is more pronounced today than at any other time in at least the past 300 years. Soja posits that while many observers, scholars, and practitioners stop here and dwell entirely on this homogenisation process, this approach is misleadingly superficial. At the very least, he argues, homogenisation and its opposite, differentiation or heterogenisation, need to be seen as simultaneous processes. Focusing too narrowly on the homogeneity of representations can lead to a failure to see the dramatic changes that have been taking place in cities and urbanism as a way of life.

The final chapter in the volume presents a summary of the rich discussions that emerged over the two-day workshop. The key themes and exchanges, and their protagonists, are included in order to offer the reader a more nuanced understanding of the multiple approaches and complex arguments that arose in response to the question of homogenisation and heterogenisation of representations in the built environment.

Globalisation and Homogenisation: The State of Play

Anthony D. King

Introduction

A central theme in the debate on globalisation is that contemporary social, economic, political, cultural, technological and other forces subsumed under that term are, according to one viewpoint, leading towards a homogenisation of all aspects of social life worldwide. These also include the built and spatial environments in which such social life occurs, on which it depends, and by which it is also influenced. Others reject this view. They claim, on one hand, that heterogenisation in these realms is much more likely to be taking place, not least in the form of active resistance to the processes of homogenisation. Yet others suggest that both processes develop in society simultaneously, though not necessarily in parallel. My aim in this paper, therefore, is to examine recent literature pertaining to this topic. This includes those authors that support the contention (that globalisation is encouraging the homogenisation of representations) and also those who contest it.

First, however, we need a clarification of terms. By globalisation, I refer to what Held has called ‘the speeding up in world-wide connectedness in all aspects of social life’ (Held et al., 1999: 2) and by homogenisation of representations, I refer especially to the idea that what we see in cities – the urban landscape – is becoming increasingly visually similar, particularly as a result of the similar ideologies and concepts of modernity being brought to bear upon it. In referring to the effects of globalisation on the built and spatial environment, I also include its effects on architecture, urban design and form and on the built environment in its widest and most general sense. This, in turn, we recognise as part of a larger process of the globalisation of, for instance, the economy, culture, knowledge, politics and language.

Finally, if our particular concern is the supposed ‘homogenisation of (architectural) representations’ we also need to acknowledge that architectural firms (who produce most of the designs) are by no means autonomous, being dependent on clients, the public, media, builders, politicians, civil servants and fund managers, among others. Most obviously – and here I refer especially to so-called ‘global architects’ whom I discuss below – their expanding activities round the world are linked to the expansion of transnational
companies (McNeill, 2009). My argument takes the form of addressing some basic questions relevant to these issues, the first of which aims to locate our problem within a larger historical perspective.

1. Since when, by whom, and why has the ‘homogeneity of representations’ come to be seen as a ‘problem’?

These are interesting and important questions which demand more space than can be afforded here. Numerous statements affirming the apparent homogenising effects on cities of what, since the mid 1980s, has been called globalisation (or processes which we would today accept as part of that process) can be found, many of them certainly made earlier than those cited here. For example, in A Geography of Urban Places (1970) Murphy writes, ‘With the creation of a global commercial network, the spread of industrialisation and the technological revolution in transport and transferabilities, cities everywhere are becoming more like one another...’ (Murphy, 1970: 32). In 1973, David Harvey writes, ‘What is remarkable is not that urbanism is so different but that it is so similar in all metropolitan centres of the world in spite of significant differences in social policy, cultural tradition, administrative and political arrangements... and so on’ (Harvey, 1973: 278). Fast forward three decades to 2007 and we read ‘A growing volume of literature documents the spread of spatial concepts and urban forms: garden cities, green belts, new towns and, more recently, water fronts, megamalls, and new urbanist “villages”, have found their way into every city in the world, creating high levels of physical homogeneity’ (Watson, 2007: 68). Others, such as Michael Cohen (1996) speak of ‘urban convergence’ between cities of the north and south.

What we see here is that while each quotation offers various explanations for what is supposedly causing homogenisation (the spread of industrialisation, imported transport technologies, the spread of spatial concepts), the statements are imprecise. What, exactly, is meant by ‘urbanism’, ‘garden cities’, ‘new towns’ or ‘new urbanist “villages”? Do these authors imply that these particular urban phenomena are identical wherever they exist? What other transformations in economic and social life, values and lifestyle have brought about these physical and spatial changes?

2. What do we mean by the ‘homogenisation of representations’?

The charge that ‘globalisation means homogenisation’ is one that is more frequently made in relation to the media and popular culture, such as films, advertising or dress codes. When made in relation to peoples’ visual perception of the urban landscape, it usually refers to their observation of one or more features in the city, e.g. the similarity of skylines or the proliferation of similar building types worldwide (shopping malls, high-rise towers, multistorey car-parks, mosques or primary schools). What people see, and make a note of, is that which is different from what was there before, what for them was familiar. Seeing is also a selective act of ‘cultural appraisal’. We recognise what we already know and overlook what is unfamiliar. Other common features frequently remarked on might include types of urban design (waterside re-developments, gated communities, heritage landscapes); particular architectural styles (neo-vernacularism, postmodernism); similar materials (glass, concrete) and technologies (suspended roofs, curtain walls); ideologies and urban policies (preservation, squatter upgrading); signature architecture and ‘branding’; and especially logos of multinational chains (McDonalds, Starbucks), to name some of the most obvious. At a different (and perhaps more abstract) scale, perceptions of homogenisation might also, as Soja (2009) suggests, refer to the overall spatial structure of the city itself: the business district, inner and outer suburbs, ‘edge cities’. The global circulation of all these phenomena — from building types to styles, materials and ideas about cities — forms the subject matter of Guggenheim and Söderström’s recent book (2010) on the influence of global mobilities on the architecture and urban form of cities worldwide.

These features are all phenomena that are added to the urban landscape. The alternative charge is of familiar (‘traditional’) forms disappearing. Both may transform the urban landscape but they result from the differential exercise of power by different constituencies and authority figures in the city. We need to distinguish between these different phenomena and identify the particular economic, social and political forces behind them. Some (multinational logos, luxury shopping malls, or the gentrification of some old historic district) may signal a national or local governmental shift to neoliberal urban policies, including the opening up of the urban economy to foreign inward investment; others (primary schools, squatter settlement upgrading, public transport initiatives) could be the outcome of radical protest from urban social movements. Upgrading squatter settlements not only provides essential shelter, creates employment, and increases consumption but also, in generating banks of voters, changes the political process.

In discussing whether globalisation leads to the increasing homogenisation of the built environment, Hans Ibelings’ book, Supremodernism: Architecture in the Age of Globalisation (1998) is one attempt to make the charge more specific. He suggests it was the ‘big hotels’ and ‘glass box’ office buildings of the 1950s and 60s which sparked off the global ‘architectural homogenisation’ thesis. Ibelings maintains that ‘uniformity and standardisation’ also manifests itself in ‘singular structures like conference halls, theatres, exhibition complexes, churches and stadiums’. Yet difficult as it is to believe, he does not address the enormous social, economic, religious and cultural changes behind the appearance of these building types and what they mean for the growth of

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Homogenisation, the idea of some or all things becoming or being made the same, can be understood from various viewpoints. To imitate or copy, in a conscious act of mimesis, can be a form of flattery, of admiration for that which is copied. As mimicry, it can also be mockery – in which case, what is copied is deliberately distorted, made fun of or made ‘almost the same but not quite’ (Bhabha, 1992: 89). The point of mimicry is to acknowledge the presence of others and yet simultaneously assert one’s own presence and identity.

3. How is the quality of ‘similarity’ and ‘homogenisation’ identified and who is making the judgement?

Who is the critic and from where is the critique being made (geographically, socially, and not least, politically)? Which reference groups does the critic defer to, or distance her/himself from, in evaluating and applying their own criteria of judgement? What are the power relationships between different institutions commissioning these projects and the general public?

Ibelings, an ‘outsider’ and ‘non-local,’ does not acknowledge his own position, not only as a member of the globe-trotting elite but also as an architect and critic whose gaze (unlike that of an often architecturally indifferent public) is invariably drawn to architectural objects. He ignores the agency of the state, or institution, or patron, or public, to resist what he describes.

It is now conventional wisdom that when ideas about architectural styles, building types and forms are transplanted from one place in the world to another, they are invested by the local population with different cultural, social and ideological meanings (and often given different uses). Transplanted objects and ideas are invariably located in different cultural, spatial and historical settings. Historical studies of building types reproduced in different cultural sites, such as the villa or bungalow (King, 2004) invariably reveal transformations in use, form and meanings. The innovative idea of the ‘garden city’ housing estate, used in early 20th-century Britain to provide democratic social housing for the working class, was transferred to British colonies overseas where it was used to maintain strict racial segregation between white and non-white subjects (Home, 1997).

4. What do we mean by homogenisation and what meanings can it have?

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5. The homogenisation of representations: What can we learn from an historical perspective?

The fact that similar types of buildings, used for the same purpose and frequently bearing a similar name, appearance and spatial form, can be found in different places in the world is well known. The oldest examples are probably buildings of worship – the temples, churches, mosques, synagogues, shrines, and also religiously-related schools, madrasas, hospitals, monasteries – resulting from the spread of the major world religions. The phenomenon may result from population migrations, and also
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of ‘economics, similar architectural principles as well as construction systems’ (1998: 42). In the context of Ibelings’ comments, therefore, we need to ask:

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Imitation can also be used to create an equivalence – whether between buildings, cities, countries or cultures – if only in ironic fashion. Advertisements for luxury villa developments in Beijing, for example, are marketed as being ‘just like Long Island in New York, Just like Beverly Hills in California, Just like Richmond in Vancouver’. (King, 2004: 118). Images of Beijing’s new commercial centre, the Sun Dong An Plaza, are published alongside those of London’s Canary Wharf, New York’s Manhattan and Tokyo’s Ginza development, implying that they are of equivalent architectural or aesthetic standard with equal economic and symbolic value (King and Kusno, 2000: 45).

When ‘homogenisation’ is used in referring to the urban landscape, in most cases it can be assumed that criticism is implied. Homogenisation is ipso facto ‘bad’. Yet homogenisation in the sense of making things similar by eliminating difference, for example, reducing social conflict and creating harmony, would, for most observers, be seen as desirable. Urban landscapes that manifest massive difference in scale between the size and costs of buildings, between the gross provision of luxury housing for the rich and the dismal squatter conditions of the poor, present obvious opportunities for more homogeneous development.

The subtle differences between the concepts of copying, mimesis, mimicry and imitation discussed above by no means exhaust the rich vocabulary prompted by a consideration of the blunt concept of homogenisation. This provides a veritable buzz of analogous or cognate terms, each of which creates possibilities for differentiating between different parts of what some describe (with negative assumptions) as our increasingly ‘homogenous’ urban and architectural environment: we can speak, for example, about affinity, analogy, approximation, cloning, comparison, emulation, facsimile, replica, reproduction, resemblance, simulacrum, verisimilitude (Roget and Roget, 1967), each with subtly different meanings. Some of the distinctions can be used to fill in the conceptual space which Soja implicitly suggests there exists between the binary concepts of homogeneity and heterogeneity (Soja, 2009). Poets or novelists often know better than many social scientists not just what and how we see, but especially how we articulate what we see. Visual perception depends on our own sensibilities and the richness or poverty of our vocabulary to express it.

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include the diffusion of technologies and the establishment and spread of regional and later global empires (see below) which continued the process. As trade routes were expanded, migrating populations simultaneously transferred beliefs, values, institutions, practices, and the complementary architectural forms, spaces and styles in which they were accommodated, around the world. In all cases, such architectural forms have played a key symbolic as well as socially functional role in establishing the presence of diasporic world religions.

Today, secular shifts away from religion in some parts of the world transform both the form and use of what were once religious buildings. In Britain, for example, urban churches have been turned into apartments, gyms, circus and climbing schools, community centres but also, with the changing ethnic and religious demographics of the urban population, into mosques, gurdwaras and temples. In Rio de Janeiro, and many other Brazilian cities, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism has transformed empty cinemas into places of worship.

Modern European empires have adopted – and, equally important, also adapted – the forms and styles of ancient ones (especially from Greece and Rome) in extending their political reach – in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and also elsewhere. Architects in contemporary cultures, such as China and India, have, in adopting modified versions of postmodernism, appropriated the neo-Classical styles of their European predecessors, modifying them in the process. Probably the most visually and structurally similar building form, used for palaces, parliaments and post offices in colonial cities round the world is the Classical columned portico of the Greek temple, popularised by the Palladian villa (King, 2004: ch. 7). In all these cases, however, the political and social meaning invested in the design has been that of those who have used it.

From medieval times, technologies of warfare and gunpowder have ensured a comparability (and similarity) of defensive installations, with forts and castles, transplanted by Spain and Portugal from Europe to South America and the Caribbean. Transportation technologies have largely determined the representational architecture of docks, railroad stations, airports, and automobile parks. 19th and 20th century modifications in building materials – iron, concrete, steel, glass, plastics – have been combined with Modern Movement ideology, originally from Germany’s Bauhaus (Baumeister, 2007; Ray, 2010), to bring a specific form of representational homogeneity in cities all over the world, from Brasilia to Chandigarh, Addis Ababa to Jakarta (Holston, 1989; Prakash, 2002; Fuller, 2006; Kusno, 2000), long before the recent present. Yet as Baumeister (2007) and Ray (2010) point out, the principles behind Bauhaus practices have been adapted, in each case, to local political and geographical conditions and prevailing ideologies. As the cited sources indicate, Modernist architecture has been used to sustain regimes of democratic socialism (Germany), colonial oppression (Italy), and postcolonial nationalism (India).

In all of these cases where apparently similar architectural and spatial forms have been transplanted around the world, bringing with them, especially for the ‘outside’ observer, an apparent visual homogeneity between the places where they exist, nowhere can it be said that the process has erased, or subsumed, the distinctive identities of the populations which have occupied these places. There are, of course, some worldwide commonalities which must be acknowledged, for example, the sense of religious belonging among adherents of particular world religions, of sharing a language in common among a postcolonial population, or of experiencing an ethnic identity. Yet as sociologist Roland Robertson (1992) has written, globalisation has usually ‘exacerbated’ a sense of individual and ethnic identity, not erased it.

If we ask what makes the present ‘global situation’ distinctive and different from the past, it is the recent spectacular speeding up in communication, the compression of space and time (Harvey, 1989), generated by the rapid growth of jet air travel from the 1970s and the instantaneous projection of images through the internet, television, as well as film and photography; for those born since 1980, this has mostly happened during their lifetime. For this particular cohort, an impression has been conveyed that the global circulation of urban and architectural forms is somehow a recent phenomenon.

6. The greatest force in ‘homogenising’ the built environment: Imperialism or Globalisation?

As earlier citations suggest, the processes of what, since the late 1980s, we have called ‘globalisation’, were there long before the word entered our vocabulary. Imperialism and colonialism as forerunners of the present phase of globalisation are addressed in historian John Darwin’s book, After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire (2007). Darwin argues that empires are the rule, not the exception in world history, referring not simply to the European empires of the 19th and 20th centuries, but also earlier ones in Asia (Qing Chinese, Korean, Mughal etc.), Central and South America (Inca, Aztec), and elsewhere. It is these and especially later empires which laid the foundations of contemporary globalisation.

In a similar vein, in Globalisation in World History (2002), Anthony Hopkins argues that globalisation has a much longer history than is often acknowledged. Not only does he emphasise the non-Western phases and experiences of globalisation (including those of Islam) but he also draws attention to its earlier historical forms, which he terms the archaic (prior to 1600), proto (from the 18th century), modern (from the 19th century, and including the imperial phase) and postcolonial globalisation (after 1950 or 1970). As Said (1991) shows in regard to language, literature and the arts, and many other
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Imperialism brings to its territories both similarities as well as differences. First is the spatial mark of conquest, of political and military power: the imposition of barracks, parade grounds, armouries, prisons, and the implementation of institutional authority expressed in buildings and spaces of social control. But then each empire is characterised by its own cultural (and often religious) values such that, to a certain degree, French colonial urbanism in Algeria may have features in common with that in Vietnam just as British planning laws in Southern Africa have something in common with those in the West Indies (Home, 1997). On the other hand, not only are the indigenous cultures and landscapes of colonised territories all very different but the cultures and practices of imperial powers are also dissimilar.

Of most importance, the political and cultural influences of imperialism were not just instances of a one-way traffic; they have, in turn, been resisted, accommodated, adapted, and transformed over time by many local agents (Chattopadhyay, 2006; Hosagrahar, 2005; Nasr and Volait, 1999; Yeoh, 1996). The outcome has been a vast range of urban landscapes of hybridity, diversity and innovation (AlSayyad, 2000; Pieterse, 2004).

How have these historical colonial cities impacted the contemporary everyday lives of the postcolonial societies where they exist? This is a massive question which would need to be addressed at the level of the individual city. The remnants of the ‘dual city’ certainly continue to divide the rich and poor in many states, with the initial colonial structure of the city still determining the shape of its contemporary development, influencing the nature and type of social and political relationships, and contributing to the maintenance of social hierarchies. This phenomenon of imperialism, however, is only part of a larger question:

7. How are questions of homogenisation and heterogenisation affected by different social, political and economic formations?

As representations, buildings, architectural styles, spatial forms, belong to specific modes of production, systems of meaning and modes of expression. As such, they are part of the city’s visual culture. These images, however, are epiphenomenal; that is to say they are secondary symptoms of larger economic, social, or political formations, forms produced by different distributions of power and divisions of labour. We need to understand what social institutions and functions buildings accommodate and spaces contain or display (Markus, 1993). If there really is ‘architectural homogenisation’ in the world’s cities, what are the economic, social, political and cultural forces behind this?

Throughout history changes have taken place in the political and social formations that have produced different forms of building, planning and architecture, different skylines and urban cadastres, giving cities and their inhabitants distinctive identities. In medieval Europe, for example, the principal forces (and patrons) were the church, monarchs, ducal courts, religious foundations and guilds of wealthy towns. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, patronage lay with imperial, colonial and national governments, banks, national and international corporations, and the military and industrial knowledge complex.

And as suggested earlier, changes in the forms of architecture and urban space have as much to do with the disappearance of particular types of patron and user as much as the appearance of others. Moreover, particular modes of production and ideologies, some global in scope, such as socialism, fascism and capitalist consumerism, with different forms of patronage, have challenged the role of the nation-state as the major influence on architectural identity (Smith, 1990). Yet as a force in forming the space of modern cities, the nation-state cannot be so easily dismissed. Most recently, neo-liberal governments, by privatising public services and handing public space to multinational corporations, are accused of eliminating cultural differences everywhere and introducing similar consumer innovations: suburban shopping malls, gated communities, multiplex cinemas, franchised food outlets and theme parks. How do these processes take place in the contemporary world?

8. The ‘corporate city’: the epicentre of contemporary homogenisation?

According to recent critics, it is the ‘corporate city’ that preserves and promotes the hegemonic and homogenising discourses of globalisation and consumerism (Daskalaki et al., 2008: 53). Utilising glass-faced, anonymous office blocks, capitalism’s corporate forces ‘convert places that could encourage difference and interaction into “non-
scholars have shown in relation to the architecture, space, urban design and planning of cities, different forms of colonialism have had a massive, and often continuing influence on innumerable cultures and territories, not least in creating the structural similarity of ‘dual cities’ in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. These histories are part of an extensive literature on this topic that has developed in the last thirty years (AlSayyad, 1991; Çelik, 2008; Fuller, 2006; King, 1976 and 1990; Scriven and Prakash, 2007).

What Salvatore (2009: 21) calls ‘the three big Islamic empires of early modernity, Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal’ informed by specific religious beliefs, brought different forms of civilisational modernity to conquered territory than those brought by the later empires of Europe. This is a theme recently explored in Çelik’s comparative study of the urban and architectural modernisations in the French colonies of the Maghrib and Ottoman Arab provinces in the Middle East (Çelik, 2008).

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places” of homogenisation and indifference” (ibid.). Environments which previously encouraged cultural diversity and encounter have been replaced by those encouraging alienation and passive consumption. These critics cite the Swiss Re building and its surroundings in the City of London and the public space of Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz, as having been designed to have ‘maximum visual impact’ on their surroundings. They suggest that such buildings become ‘manipulative adverts’ of corporatism, ‘outlawing space for difference and social interaction’ (ibid.).

According to Arif Dirlik, global architectural firms ‘seem to derive their aesthetic legitimation... from their ability to represent global capitalism, and the clientele it is in the process of creating’ (Dirlik, 2007: 38, referring to China). The local is commodified and made over. In the case of China, the political power responsible for these developments is the (undemocratic) national government.

Daskalaki et al (2008) describe the resistance developed in response to the architectural culture and spaces of the corporate city. Starting in the Paris suburbs in 1988, ‘parkour’ or ‘free-running’ is a literal form of ‘embodied protest’. Activists use their bodies to resist the dominance of the faceless environment by ‘breaking the lines of the city’, challenging the given structures of space by running and leaping through ‘forbidden’ spaces. Their activities and philosophy act as a metaphor for active participation between the actual and possible structures of the world. Similar resistant practices include skate-boarding, the pervasive activities of graffiti artists or, earlier, the Situationist movement and its performances in Paris.

9. How possible is it to speak of ‘global architecture’ or the ‘architecture of global capitalism’?

The terms ‘global architecture’ or ‘the architecture of global capitalism’ have, in recent years, rapidly gained currency. Both terms suggest that there exists a unitary, ‘homogenous’ concept which also refers to a material reality. Yet while the term may legitimately function as a metaphor, logically, the idea of a literal ‘global architecture’ is just not feasible. This would either imply an architecture which could be found in every corner of the globe, which is impossible, or alternatively, an architecture which geographically, had developed from roots originating in every place on the globe, which is equally nonsensical.

As everything has to have a place of origin, and also the appropriate economic and political conditions in which to develop, what today is referred to as ‘global architecture’, as a form, practice and style, is derived from an adaptation in terms of materials and design, of 20th century notions of German, and subsequently Euro-American, Bauhaus design and its imitators (so-called Modernism), though today stripped of its original social commitment to egalitarianism (McNeill, 2009: 126). Its history is to be traced partially in Europe but predominantly in the cities of the USA, where it was dependent on its corporate sponsors and immense economic resources; subsequently, it has been adopted by the emerging Asian economies. Though always adapted, indigenised, and given meaning by its location (Baumeister, 2007), in each instance it becomes ‘local’ even though it is connected to a larger historical tradition (see also Holston, this volume).

Referring to China and specifically to Beijing, Ren (2007) suggests that (in China) ‘global architecture’ refers to a capital-intensive form of design, produced by international architectural firms operating in cities worldwide and is identifiable by the fact that it eschews or refuses any reference to traditional local practice; it might even be defined as architecture that is beyond local economic and technological capacities. ‘Global architecture,’ in this sense, is defined primarily by its non-local nature. (This is similar to forms of imperial architecture of centuries ago.)

In a similar context, other scholars have referred to specific ‘global types’ of building or urban design: the high-rise tower, the stand alone, bourgeois suburban house or villa (Dovey, 2008) or the gated community (Genis, 2007) which today can be found in an increasing number of cities worldwide. Yet while they have some features in common, none of these phenomena can be described as totally alike. As for the idea of a ‘global skyline’, this is a concept that, if not lexically expressed as such until quite recently, has, from the late 19th century and then accelerating in recent years, become central to the competitive practice of constructing ‘the tallest building in the world’ (King, 2004). This phenomenon exists only in virtual reality and the realms of imagination.

10. Do ‘global architects’ contribute to ‘architectural homogenisation’?

Many ideas about cultural homogenisation result from the diffusion worldwide of both social and urban theory, not least concepts about the ‘world’ or ‘global city’ (Sassen, 2000) and what are seen as the minimum spatial and symbolic requirements needed to achieve this status. What are the implications of this for both the built as well the lived environment? In terms of the built environment, this ‘global city theory’ is interpreted to mean not only what needs adding to the city (high-rise office towers, signature buildings, convention centres, ‘world class’ hotels, luxury apartments, flyovers, and not least, a ‘modern’ skyline) but also what requires removing from it, most notably, squatter settlements.

‘Signature’ buildings, and what has come to be called ‘starchitecture’, however, and the ‘branding’ of the city with the designs of ‘global architects’ (also part of the ‘global city’ agenda) requires commitment on the part of local, city (and national) sponsors to the value system of where this practice originates. The resultant collection of signature
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particularly associated with the notion of ‘global architecture’ is the rise of the ‘global city’ in the West (King, 2006). This has resulted in attention being focused especially on economic institutions in the city and also to its superficial physical and spatial attributes. As McNeill has suggested, ‘Globalisation as a process of capitalist development has advanced quickest in the domain of symbols’ (McNeill 2009: 96), most of them becoming known through the widespread circulation of ‘promotional’ architectural magazines and journals. As the global clamour greeting yet one more ‘iconic’ building is displaced by that of another, the idea of the ‘icon’, now part of every global architect’s vocabulary, has transformed the spectacular into the ordinary.

Adams (2008) suggests that, as the majority of transnational companies are American, so are the global architectural firms which serve their interests: ‘North American cash has brought North American architecture’. According to Adams, of the 50 major architectural firms with global business, 22 are from the US, 15 from the UK, and others from Australia and Ireland. Eighty percent are Anglophone. Their work sets the framework for global competition and ‘clients are sold a uniform global brand’ (Adams, 2008).

These architectural megapractices, with AEDAS, for example, employing 800 creative team members spread around six countries or SOM with another 800 producing standard architectural designs, that often have little reference to local cultures, have been responsible for creating the spread of ‘a commercial brand of postmodernism’ (McNeill, 2009) which has been used to brand particular buildings and cities. The linking of some of these firms (and brands, such as Foster & Partners) to venture capital groups, and the tendency to sign up more deals in a specific geographical area to gain economies of scale and time (ibid.: 31), has contributed to a reduction in diversity and, for outside observers, created an impression of homogenisation.

Particularly associated with the notion of ‘global architecture’ is the rise of the phenomenon of the ‘starchitect’ from the 1990s, whose signature building marks him (or occasionally, her) as a celebrity. The assumption that a spectacular building can transform the economic fortunes of a city – the so-called ‘Bilbao effect’, following the building of Frank Gehry’s ‘iconic’ museum in that city – has created a demand, in some cases, for exactly the same design to be used in other cities. Designs become stereotyped, ‘trophies’ to be collected by particular cities. According to McNeill, what is not recognised is that many other factors, coincidental to the building of Gehry’s museum, were also responsible for the improvement of Bilbao’s economic fortunes (McNeill, 2009: 81). In many cases, the new concentration of wealth caused by the maldistribution of income worldwide, with the gains in economic growth going predominantly to rich countries, has been behind the commissioning of work from ‘starchitects’.

In adopting the ‘celebrity architect’ in an attempt to transform the fortunes of declining cities, what is also overlooked is the specific cultural context, central to the functioning of American capitalism in which this concept developed, namely the privileging of the individual at the expense of the social. This is not a set of values currently widespread outside the USA, but the practice may indeed encourage such values to develop in the public sphere. ‘Visual homogenisation’ may also be encouraged by the rapidly increasing number of global architectural competitions and prizes involving committees travelling around the world, using a given set of aesthetic criteria to evaluate buildings which often have little or no connection to the local. The outcome can often be a case of ‘the monotony of the exceptional.’

## 11. Globalisation or Delocalisation?

The decision of firms to ‘go global’ requires a delocalisation of both representational architecture and the symbolic nature of its design and also of the company name. Over a century ago, photography mogul George Eastman sought a company name that was short, easily written and remembered, and pronounceable in most world languages. The name he came up with was ‘Kodak’. Employing a similar logic, today’s corporations and architectural firms consciously disconnect themselves from their local or national architectural and geographical origins or from the names of their founders, and replace names with ‘placeless’ acronyms which are perceived as ‘globally mobile’ (McNeill 2009: 28) – AEDAS, KPF, SOM, HOK, IKEA; and most recently, AVIVA (previously Norwich Union, ‘the world’s fifth largest insurance company’). To cite the words of one of the company’s representatives: ‘as a global company we need a name that will be recognised anywhere’ (Hughes, 2009).

‘Placeless’ names, like ‘placeless’ architectural styles, may delocalise in one place, yet in contemporary China, as I discuss below, they attempt to confer a spurious ‘global’ identity on some architectural project elsewhere. The essence and assumed logic of this is in the simultaneous creation of both difference and similarity: temporal difference, in relation to distinguishing itself from what was there before; geocultural difference, in
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Adams (2008) suggests that, as the majority of transnational companies are American,
in this context, as a contribution to ‘global knowledge’, the invention and proliferation
worldwide of a particular notion of the ‘global city’ has had a disastrous effect. From
the start, the definition of the term has focused almost solely on economic criteria,
paying little if any attention to the historical, cultural, or religious context in which
the world or global city developed in the West (King, 2006). This has resulted in
attention being focussed especially on economic institutions in the city and also to its
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1 These figures are taken from sources published prior to the 2008 and ongoing global credit crisis which
has caused many of these firms to lay off personnel.

2 ‘trophies’ can reduce cities which were previously identified by their own architectural vernacular to imitative clones of each other.

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nation-state. Similarity, on the other hand, is constructed in relation to the architecture
of other cities, irrespective of location, but which are part of the reference group to
which the particular building patron, or occupant institution, wishes to belong. As
detailed earlier in the paper, this simultaneous establishment of both similarity and
difference attempts to claim the necessary attribute of equivalence. In other words,
the process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming global’ is no different from the familiar old story
of ‘being’ or ‘becoming modern’. The act, and the outcome that results, is entirely
relational, that is, we are ‘global’ or ‘modern’ but only in comparison to someone or
somewhere else.

12. Where is homogenisation in cities?

If homogenisation of representations means bringing similarity to, and perhaps between
(especially) ‘third world’ cities worldwide then in one sense this might be acceptable.
Policies contributing to neo-liberal globalisation grossly exacerbate uneven urban
development, not only between rich countries and poor countries but also between
rich and poor populations in cities worldwide. Outsourcing employment from rich to
poor countries depends on these gross disparities. The one accepted conclusion about
‘global cities’ that two decades of research and publications has shown us concerns
the massive economic, social and spatial polarisation between the rich and poor, both
locationally in terms of their place in the city and materially, in their differential access to
space, shelter and services (water, electricity, schools, markets, etc.). Homogenisation
in this case is in the similarities of contrasts in the city, with iconic spectacles, luxury
condos, new shopping malls for the wealthy on one hand, and gross overcrowding,
homelessness and squatter settlements for the poor on the other.

13. What are the impacts of homogenisation on the public sphere? A view from Beijing

As I suggested at the start of this paper, one argument supporting the ‘architectural
homogenisation’ thesis concerns not just what is added to the city but also what is
taken away, including the disappearance or neglect of culturally different lifestyles and
the spaces and built environments that support them. In the long term, it is suggested
that this has led to the loss of cultural identity and with this, a social and psychic shift
to more ‘modern’ subjectivities and identities.

The misconceptions of such generalisations are best brought out by specific case studies
which provide some insight into contemporary processes of identity construction.
According to Xuefei Ren’s empirical studies of transnational architectural production in
China (2007), the new ‘transnational architecture’ introduced by prominent international
architects (Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, Herzog/de Meuron, Paul Andreu and
others) in recent years into Beijing has been subject to different interpretations in
the public sphere. Dependent on the commissioning agent concerned, the results are
invested with different meanings. For the local developers, avant-garde designs become
a branding tool in order that they can market their products more successfully. For
city officials and administrators, avant garde design policies have been used to advance
their political careers. For the Communist authoritarian state itself, the ultra modern,
very deliberate ‘non Chinese’ modernist design functions to symbolise the arrival of
‘modern China’ on the world stage. In a neat contradictory inversion, therefore, ‘being
global’ (whatever this means) is used to promote and enhance a nationalistic agenda.
As ‘space is consumed globally by a worldwide audience of spectators watching images
circulating in global television networks’ (as with the Olympic Games) ‘means that it
is constantly subject to multiple, and often contradictory interpretations, whether by
local and translocal actors’. (Ren, 2007: xi–xii). To be seen as ‘modern’, foreign and
futuristic, Chinese architects have adopted a style of the ‘severest minimalism’, i.e.
without any decoration or ‘featuring’ whatsoever. For a younger generation of Chinese
professionals, keen to display their rising status and anti-traditional stance, expressly
non-Chinese cultural symbols are the key (Ren, 2007: 121–40).

Similar interpretations have been offered in earlier times. Over the last fifty years,
in different historical and geographical circumstances (Brasilia, Jakarta, Chandigarh,
Tripoli) reformist (as well as colonial) governments and political leaders have used
so-called Modernist or International Style architecture in various ways (Holston, 1989;
Kusno, 2000; Prakash, 2002; Fuller, 2006; Ray, 2010). In all cases, however, what needs
to be recognised is that architectural style, in itself, has no intrinsic meaning except in
relation to the discourses that accompany it.

Breidenbach and Zukrigl (1999) have suggested that societies are becoming different
in more uniform ways. This could well be an accurate observation if made in relation
to the increasing adoption worldwide of ‘heritage’ policies. What are seen by local
officials as historic and culturally significant vernacular buildings, or even entire urban
enclaves embodying collective social memories, are refurbished or even rebuilt with
the specific objective of marking them off from other places. Yet as all histories are
different, are the differences manifest in similar ways?

Conclusion

If it is accepted that there is an increasing degree of ‘homogenisation of representations’ in
the architecture and urban spaces of cities worldwide (and I have argued that this cannot
be taken for granted) and if action has to be taken to modify this, it must lie in the field of
politics: for governments, institutions, and publics to resist the persistent pressure from
(especially) non-local corporate power; for architectural schools to rethink curricula and
relation to what continues to exist within the relevant cultural and spatial region of the nation-state. Similarity, on the other hand, is constructed in relation to the architecture of other cities, irrespective of location, but which are part of the reference group to which the particular building patron, or occupant institution, wishes to belong. As detailed earlier in the paper, this simultaneous establishment of both similarity and difference attempts to claim the necessary attribute of equivalence. In other words, the process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming global’ is no different from the familiar old story of ‘being’ or ‘becoming modern’. The act, and the outcome that results, is entirely relational, that is, we are ‘global’ or ‘modern’ but only in comparison to someone or somewhere else.

12. Where is homogenisation in cities?

If homogenisation of representations means bringing similarity to, and perhaps between (especially) ‘third world’ cities worldwide then in one sense this might be acceptable. Policies contributing to neo-liberal globalisation grossly exacerbate uneven urban development, not only between rich countries and poor countries but also between rich and poor populations in cities worldwide. Outsourcing employment from rich to poor countries depends on these gross disparities. The one accepted conclusion about ‘global cities’ that two decades of research and publications has shown us concerns the massive economic, social and spatial polarisation between the rich and poor, both locationally in terms of their place in the city and materially, in their differential access to space, shelter and services (water, electricity, schools, markets, etc.). Homogenisation in this case is in the similarities of contrasts in the city, with iconic spectacles, luxury condos, new shopping malls for the wealthy on one hand, and gross overcrowding, homelessness and squatter settlements for the poor on the other.

13. What are the impacts of homogenisation on the public sphere? A view from Beijing

As I suggested at the start of this paper, one argument supporting the ‘architectural homogenisation’ thesis concerns not just what is added to the city but also what is taken away, including the disappearance or neglect of culturally different lifestyles and the spaces and built environments that support them. In the long term, it is suggested that this has led to the loss of cultural identity and with this, a social and psychic shift to more ‘modern’ subjectivities and identities.

The misconceptions of such generalisations are best brought out by specific case studies which provide some insight into contemporary processes of identity construction. According to Xuefei Ren’s empirical studies of transnational architectural production in China (2007), the new ‘transnational architecture’ introduced by prominent international architects (Rem Koolhaas, Norman Foster, Herzog/de Meuron, Paul Andreu and others) in recent years into Beijing has been subject to different interpretations in the public sphere. Dependent on the commissioning agent concerned, the results are invested with different meanings. For the local developers, avant-garde designs become a branding tool in order that they can market their products more successfully. For city officials and administrators, avant-garde design policies have been used to advance their political careers. For the Communist authoritarian state itself, the ultra modern, very deliberate ‘non Chinese’ modernist design functions to symbolise the arrival of ‘modern China’ on the world stage. In a neat contradictory inversion, therefore, ‘being global’ (whatever this means) is used to promote and enhance a nationalistic agenda. As ‘space is consumed globally by a worldwide audience of spectators watching images circulating in global television networks’ (as with the Olympic Games) ‘means that it is constantly subject to multiple, and often contradictory interpretations, whether by local and translocal actors’. (Ren, 2007: xi–xii). To be seen as ‘modern’, foreign and futuristic, Chinese architects have adopted a style of the ‘severest minimalism’, i.e. without any decoration or ‘featuring’ whatsoever. For a younger generation of Chinese professionals, keen to display their rising status and anti-traditional stance, expressly non-Chinese cultural symbols are the key (Ren, 3007: 121–40).

Similar interpretations have been offered in earlier times. Over the last fifty years, in different historical and geographical circumstances (Brasilia, Jakarta, Chandigarh, Tripoli) reformist (as well as colonial) governments and political leaders have used so-called Modernist or International Style architecture in various ways (Holston, 1989; Kusno, 2000; Prakash, 2002; Fuller, 2006; Ray, 2010). In all cases, however, what needs to be recognised is that architectural style, in itself, has no intrinsic meaning except in relation to the discourses that accompany it.

Breidenbach and Zukrigl (1999) have suggested that societies are becoming different in more uniform ways. This could well be an accurate observation if made in relation to the increasing adoption worldwide of ‘heritage’ policies. What are seen by local officials as historic and culturally significant vernacular buildings, or even entire urban enclaves embodying collective social memories, are refurbished or even rebuilt with the specific objective of marking them off from other places. Yet as all histories are different, are the differences manifest in similar ways?

Conclusion

If it is accepted that there is an increasing degree of ‘homogenisation of representations’ in the architecture and urban spaces of cities worldwide (and I have argued that this cannot be taken for granted) and if action has to be taken to modify this, it must lie in the field of politics: for governments, institutions, and publics to resist the persistent pressure from (especially) non-local corporate power; for architectural schools to rethink curricula and
put the needs of society and values of economic and social equity at the centre of the curriculum, accepting that architecture is not just an art or technical object, but also a social object. Continuing present trends, encouraging high-energy, unsustainable buildings and glass-walled skyscrapers on air-cooled beaches, is a road to disaster.

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References


The Anxiety Concerning Cultural Homogenisation

Ian Angus

When I went back to Buenos Aires in 2000, for the first time after living there for a year in 1993–4, my wife Viviana and I were horrified to see MacDonald’s and Burger King on Avenida Santa Fé. One of the most lovely things about Buenos Aires is the cafés, the café con leche and medialunas de grasa; to see them ceding space to these ugly imports produced a visceral reaction. I later noticed that these international – that is to say U.S. – fast food outlets served espresso coffee in small plastic cups. One could also get it ‘cortado’ with a little bit of milk which is a common way to drink it there. If the homogenisation into an international bland style produces horror, is a cortado in a plastic cup enough cultural difference to assuage the reaction? How much difference is enough? What sort of difference? Is cultural homogenisation really taking place if it makes some adaptation to local conditions? Or is it the blandness and ugliness that is the problem? Would we be horrified if homogenisation reproduced the style of the lovely old streets of Prague?

The charge of cultural homogenisation has been used to criticise and resist the phenomenon which it names, the phenomenon of the imposition of cultural norms and practices by stronger social actors on the weaker – a phenomenon which, at least in the eyes of its critics, pertains to many areas of politics, economics, art and material culture. Thus, in the background paper to the current workshop Modjtaba Sadria points out that in previous discussions ‘a key issue… was related to the processes of homogenisation of representations. During the discussions it became clear that if such processes do exist, and to the extent that they exist, they become a limitation – even a denial – of pluralism in general and the plurality of modernities in particular’. The charge of cultural homogenisation – I will explain why I prefer this term to speaking of ‘representations’ below – is thus brought forth in the name of a fear or an anxiety for the loss of cultural diversity or, as is often said, genuine cultural diversity, which means a cultural diversity that matters to the speaker. In addressing the question of whether such processes of homogenisation do indeed exist, others have pointed out, in either a hopeful or resigned mood depending on their own standpoint, that the supposed homogenisation never actually takes place: there is always adaptation to local conditions, social movements that resist, and the in principle fact that a reproduction never reproduces an original exactly (and what is an original anyway? is it not itself formed through interaction with prior
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influences?). Thus, every actual phenomenon of cultural transmission seems to involve an interplay of homogeneity and heterogeneity, an interplay that can be described by various social scientific methods and is visible to the naked eye. The remaining difficulty, however, is that the critical function of the concept of homogenisation is thereby exhausted and that evaluation of social processes and trends succumbs to straightforward description.

I would like to suggest that cultural homogenisation is not a descriptive concept either in the way that it is used by critics of the process or in the way that it relates to the social phenomena to which it is pertinent. It is a second-order concept, in the sense that it refers not to the description of social reality but to the categories through which we describe social reality. If it is used simply as a descriptive concept it functions in an entirely different way than as it is used in the critical discourse from which it emerged. Cultural homogenisation is a critical concept in the sense that it gets its meaning from defining and describing a deep-rooted tendency which, though threatening, is not total. Not only is it not total, but the deployment of the critical concept is a social action that aims at making it even less total. As a critical concept, it is designed to indicate and illuminate something lacking in the current social framework. That lack is the lack of a sufficiently strong tendency toward cultural diversity due precisely to the correlative tendency toward homogenisation. As a critical concept, its purpose is not description of a state of affairs but an intervention into the way in which we think about that state of affairs in order to open up possibilities for future action that would not otherwise be apparent. More exactly, a critical concept allows one to draw the limits of applicability of homogenisation and therefore to open up other possibilities. Thus, I would agree with the suggestion behind the workshop that homogenisation is a problem and that a more adequate social framework would in some way incorporate heterogeneity. But, note that cultural homogenisation is one critical concept; there is no reason to believe that it is the only one; it would require combination with other critical concepts to formulate a critical theory fully adequate to contemporary society; it is here that other concepts such as the culture industry, colonialism, Euro-centrism, class exploitation, and dispossession that have been deployed in critical social theory would fit in. My present contribution to this debate will not be to justify the concept of cultural homogenisation as a critical concept as such, nor to address what sort of cultural diversity is sufficiently plural or genuine, but to explain why the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation, an anxiety that gives rise to the critical concept, is an unavoidable problem in modern societies and thereby, I hope, to explain the legitimacy of some such critical concept and its relevance to issues of social inequality and power. To do so, I need to touch lightly upon a number of issues that are eminently debatable on their own terms. I will attempt this with ten-league boots, as it were, striding over the many specific debates in an attempt to establish a larger perspective on the anxiety itself.

The Spirit of Modernity and Material Culture

The term and concept of modernity refers to many phenomena depending on the disciplines and contexts in which it is used. European modernity arose out of a complex of historical changes in which we can perhaps single out three which are significant for contemporary thinking about the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation: the development of modern science, with its intrinsic relation to technology, that occurred in the scientific revolution of the 17th century; the rise of the modern state, with its standardisation of language and administration, which took place unevenly over a long period; and the differentiation of the spheres of art, science, economics and politics into separate compartments which is inseparable from the process of secularisation. All of these are related in complex ways to the rise of capitalism, though I will address this aspect of the problem separately below.1 Insofar as in pre-modern, traditional societies a socially dominant religion tied activities in these spheres to an over-reaching concept of the good and the sacred, secularisation allows the separated spheres to follow intrinsic logics.

It may well be doubted whether there is a single concept of modernity that would subtend these phenomena, let alone those other elements of art, politics and philosophy that might be added. Nevertheless, later European thinkers have noted similar components in them that are the basis for a specific concept of modernity essentially tied to rationality. Max Weber is a crucial figure in this regard not only since both his sociology of modern Europe and his comparative sociology of world religions depend upon identifying such a concept of reason but because it is exemplary of more widespread ideas about modernity in European culture and thought – ideas which have also had significant impact around the world. Weber identified a conception of reason tied to both technological science and bureaucratic social organisation whose formalism negated any conception of substantive reason inherent in a religiously legitimated over-reaching concept of the good and the sacred. He stated that ‘in principle a system of rationally debatable “reasons” stands behind every act of bureaucratic administration, that is, either subsumption under norms or a weighing of ends and means’.2 If we can connect modernity to a form of reason as ‘subsumption’, as Max Weber suggested, a form that encompasses both its scientific-technological origin and bureaucratic social organisation, and if we suspect that there exists a pressure toward adopting this form in societies other than where it first developed, then

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1. Thus, a key underlying issue of this paper is the relation between modernity and capitalism, an issue that has been debated in classical social theory between Marxists and Weberians. It should be noted, however, that both sides in the debate acknowledge a relation between the two terms, so that it is not a simple either/or that is at issue but questions of causation and predominance. I will not take a position on this debate in this paper but rather treat modernity and capitalism as two distinct but inter-related phenomena. This would ground a position beyond this classic debate if its implications were to be sufficiently worked out.

Cultural homogenisation is an entirely different way than as it is used in the critical discourse from which it emerged. We describe social reality. If it is used simply as a descriptive concept it functions in an entirely different way than as it is used in the critical discourse from which it emerged. Cultural homogenisation is a critical concept in the sense that it gets its meaning from defining and describing a deep-rooted tendency which, though threatening, is not total. Not only is it not total, but the deployment of the critical concept is a social action that aims at making it even less total. As a critical concept, it is designed to indicate and illuminate something lacking in the current social framework. That lack is the lack of a sufficiently strong tendency toward cultural diversity due precisely to the correlative tendency toward homogenisation. As a critical concept, its purpose is not description of a state of affairs but an intervention into the way in which we think about that state of affairs in order to open up possibilities for future action that would not otherwise be apparent. More exactly, a critical concept allows one to draw the limits of applicability of homogenisation and therefore to open up other possibilities. Thus, I would agree with the suggestion behind the workshop that homogenisation is a problem and that a more adequate social framework would in some way incorporate heterogeneity. But, note that cultural homogenisation is one critical concept; there is no reason to believe that it is the only one; it would require combination with other critical concepts to formulate a critical theory fully adequate to contemporary society; it is here that other concepts such as the culture industry, colonialism, Euro-centrism, class exploitation, and dispossession that have been deployed in critical social theory would fit in. My present contribution to this debate will not be to justify the concept of cultural homogenisation as a critical concept as such, nor to address what sort of cultural diversity is sufficiently plural or genuine, but to explain why the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation, an anxiety that gives rise to the critical concept, is an unavoidable problem in modern societies and thereby, I hope, to explain the legitimacy of some such critical concept and its relevance to issues of social inequality and power. To do so, I need to touch lightly upon a number of issues that are eminently debatable on their own terms. I will attempt this with ten-league boots, as it were, striding over the many specific debates in an attempt to establish a larger perspective on the anxiety itself.

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we must address the question of whether this pressure is a universal one or whether it is in essence the pressure of one cultural form upon others. Max Weber articulated what was once a common view, in Europe at least, when he stated that ‘a product of modern European civilisation, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilisation, and in Western civilisation only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having universal significance and value’. A lot depends now on whether there are really any grounds for thinking such a thing. One of the keys to unlocking this issue is the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation.

From its beginning, modernity has generated an anxiety about the homogenisation of culture. Since modernity is instituted through a claim to knowledge based on scientific rationality that is essentially tied to technological innovation, it is haunted by the possibility of homogenisation. Modernity is a re-naisance, a new birth or beginning, which articulates itself against a notion of the past that is to be overcome. The past is the ground of culture, usually articulated in a religion that is necessarily diverse since it has been developed through traditional practices that diverge and interact in various places on the earth. Culture always implies cultures in the plural, whereas scientific rationality points toward a single truth. Thus, the anxiety about cultural homogenisation is deep-rooted. Modernity began in Europe and the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation first haunted the diverse European cultures and nations, but modernity has since become global and the anxiety has, likewise, become global.

A living culture comprises both ongoing practices and representations of those practices. Indeed, a living culture consists in the interplay between practices and representations. Representations are always produced and maintained by practices and practices require understanding and articulation to be continuously followed and allow innovation. When culture becomes purely representation, it has entered the museum – that is to say, the practices that sustain the representation are other than those that are represented: the culture becomes purely representation, it has entered the museum – that is to say, the practices that sustain the representation are other than those that are represented: the living culture has receded into the past and its representations remain to be sustained and consulted by others. Thus, a purely representational, or semiotic, approach to understanding culture is insufficient. We need to understand culture as constituted by certain practical activities and as punctuated by instituting events. Husserl’s concept of Urstiftung, which we may translate as ‘primal founding, primal establishment, or primal instituting’, but for which I will simply use the term ‘institution’, since this English term has the useful double meaning of something that is both brought into being, or instituted, and something which persists in being and continues to provide the setting within which other events and practices are situated. Pertinently, Husserl used this term for the ancient institution of geometry that was taken over by Descartes and also in relation to Descartes himself as the primal founder, or institutor (Urstifter), of ‘the modern idea of objectivist rationalism’. When a new practice, such as scientific-technological modernity, is instituted, time is divided into a before and an after. After the institution of modernity all other human events and processes are related to, formed and reformed by, this institution. To understand the significance of such institutions, a new form of questioning is required, a questioning that inquires backward from what has been established to the instituting formation itself. While this is a historical inquiry, it is not so in the usual sense. It is an inquiring backward into what must have happened in order for the institution that we now experience to have come into being. What Husserl called ‘the a priori structure contained in this historicity’.

The institution of modernity reconfigures traditional cultures by turning them into representations cut off from a sustaining cultural practice. It provides the setting from in which they are given meaning. Museum culture can be adequately preserved within scientific-technological modernity insofar as that modernity preserves the representations of the traditions and cultures against which its new institution posits itself. But can a living culture, an interplay of representation and practice, survive the institution of modernity? Modernity itself produces such an interplay and thus itself institutes a living culture of modernity. But we are again entitled to ask whether this is a single, and in that sense homogeneous, living culture, whether all other cultures are not relegated to their representation within modernity as remnants of the various traditions that once were dispersed across the world. Do they become merely represented, where modernity monopolises the power of representation? The anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation would not be assuaged either by museum remnants or by a culture of modernity that itself contains the danger of homogenisation. It points us toward the problem of time insofar as a new epoch came into being with the institution of modernity.

**Rational Uniforinity and the Metaphor of the City**

At the beginning of scientific-technological modernity, René Descartes articulated *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, whose first rule stated that ‘the purpose of our studies

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should be the direction of the mind toward the production of firm and true judgments concerning all things which come to its attention. Science in this form was not merely knowledge of many things but systematic knowledge resting on a firm foundation that was to be guaranteed by a correct method and a cumulative procedure that required a cutting-off from previous attempts at knowing. Francis Bacon agreed, arguing that ‘it is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engraving of new things upon old. We must begin anew from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress.’ In the Discourse on Method, Descartes reflected on this new methodical rationality in terms that illustrate its wide applicability. He noted that works by one person are ‘more beautiful and better planned than those remodelled by several persons using ancient walls that had originally been built for quite other purposes’, that ‘peoples who were once half savage, and who became civilised by a gradual process and invented their laws one by one as the harmfulness of crimes and quarrels forced them to outlaw them, would be less well governed than those who have followed the constitutions of some prudent legislator’, and attributed the floorishing of Sparta to the fact that its laws were ‘designed by a single legislator, and so all tended to the same end’. Similarly, he judged that those great cities that have grown from ancient towns and hamlets are ‘badly arranged compared to one of the symmetrical metropolitan districts which a city planner has laid out on an open plain according to his own designs’. The core metaphor by which Descartes, and many others also, understood the institution of modern rationality was that of children growing into adults. In a reversal of previous usage, in which the ‘ancients’ referred to those who lived a long time ago and were assumed to be wiser because of their antiquity, Bacon thought that ‘the old age of the world is to be accounted the true antiquity; and this is the attribute of our own times, not of that earlier age of the world in which the ancients thought that ‘the old age of the world is to be accounted the true antiquity; and this is the attribute of our own times, not of that earlier age of the world in which the ancients lived; and which, though in respect of us it was the elder, yet in respect of the world it was the younger’. Thus, the distinctiveness of the modern conception of reason was hidden, since it was masked as the dawn of reason as such, comparable to understanding the passage from child to adult as the onset of reason. The new science was seen by its proponents not as a new model of science and reason, but as the awakening of reason from irrational tradition. Tradition could, therefore, have very little to recommend it. The new scientific paradigm did not remain a partial enterprise but became the model of reason throughout modernity. It became the leading component within a new form of life extending to social organisation, city planning, legislation and beyond. A form of life which, after the initial phase of enthusiastic modernisation abated, could be seen to contain an anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation due to cutting off the roots of tradition and living cultural diversity. Is the only alternative that between the living culture of modernity and a nostalgia for pre-modern remnants?

It is for this reason that in our own time we are pressed to understand the possibilities for cultural diversity. We cannot shake this anxiety from ourselves. It is rooted in the assumptions with which we moderns reason and live. But we can strive to turn the anxiety into thinking. Such thinking will not only need to embrace cultural diversity, but will also need to reform the concept of reason itself. This thinking has been underway for some time. It may be indicated by the turn from science to language as the central issue of philosophy, since language is contemporaneous with the human race and inherently resists being put on a new rational foundation. Ludwig Wittgenstein put this attraction of language to contemporary philosophy into the metaphor of a city. ‘Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses’. We have come to suspect that the straight streets, regular houses, and suburban sprawl that stand for modern rationality is a dead-end street, a street that needs to be revivified by living culture in its diversity. It is with this background in mind that I want to pose in contemporary terms the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation.

The Anxiety Concerning Cultural Homogenisation

Modernity can be understood as a conception of reason and as the predominance of that conception of reason throughout human life. It is by following this thread of reason linked to science and technology but universalised beyond it, that we can find our way through the many meanings of modernity and critiques of it. It is this conception of reason that has produced the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation.

The anxiety about homogenisation never assumed that absolutely all differences would or could be abolished. There remain significant cultural differences around the relationship between individual and community in Protestant versus Catholic versions of European modernity, for example. Actual cultural identity between all human beings and groups is no doubt impossible. The anxiety originates from the perception of cultural forces tending toward homogenisation such that aspects of one’s cultural identity to which some importance is attached are feared to have no place in the future. It is the tendency

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10 Ibid.
12 Francis Bacon (1939) Novum Organum, op. cit., paragraph lxxxiv, p. 58.
was the younger’. Thus, the distinctiveness of the modern conception of reason was lived; and which, though in respect of us it was the elder, yet in respect of the world it was the attribute of our own times, not of that earlier age of the world in which the ancients lived a long time ago and were assumed to be wiser because of their antiquity, Bacon concerning all things which come to its attention’. Science in this form was not merely knowledge of many things but systematic knowledge resting on a firm foundation that was to be guaranteed by a correct method and a cumulative procedure that required a cutting-off from previous attempts at knowing. Francis Bacon agreed, arguing that ‘it is idle to expect any great advancement in science from the superinducing and engrafting of new things upon old. We must begin anew from the very foundations, unless we would revolve forever in a circle with mean and contemptible progress’. In the Discourse on Method, Descartes reflected on this new methodical rationality in terms that illustrate its wide applicability. He noted that works by one person are ‘more beautiful and better planned than those remodelled by several persons using ancient walls that had originally been built for quite other purposes’, that ‘peoples who were once half savage, and who became civilised by a gradual process and invented their laws one by one as the harmfulness of crimes and quarrels forced them to outlaw them, would be less well governed than those who have followed the constitutions of some prudent legislator’, and attributed the flourishing of Sparta to the fact that its laws were ‘designed by a single legislator, and so all tended to the same end’. Similarly, he judged that those great cities that have grown from ancient towns and hamlets ‘are badly arranged compared to one of the symmetrical metropolitan districts which a city planner has laid out on an open plain according to his own designs’. The core metaphor by which Descartes, and many others also, understood the institution of modern rationality was that of children growing into adults. In a reversal of previous usage, in which the ‘ancients’ referred to those who lived a long time ago and were assumed to be wiser because of their antiquity, Bacon thought that ‘the old age of the world is to be accounted the true antiquity; and this is the attribute of our own times, not of that earlier age of the world in which the ancients lived; and which, though in respect of us it was the elder, yet in respect of the world it was the younger’. Thus, the distinctiveness of the modern conception of reason was hidden, since it was masked as the dawn of reason as such, comparable to understanding the passage from child to adult as the onset of reason. The new science was seen by its proponents not as a new model of science and reason, but as the awakening of reason from irrational tradition. Tradition could, therefore, have very little to recommend it. The new scientific paradigm did not remain a partial enterprise but became the model of reason throughout modernity. It became the leading component within a new form of life extending to social organisation, city planning, legislation and beyond. A form of life which, after the initial phase of enthusiastic modernisation abated, could be seen to contain an anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation due to cutting off the roots of tradition and living cultural diversity. Is the only alternative that between the living culture of modernity and a nostalgia for pre-modern remnants?

It is for this reason that in our own time we are pressed to understand the possibilities for cultural diversity. We cannot shake this anxiety from ourselves. It is rooted in the assumptions with which we moderns reason and live. But we can strive to turn the anxiety into thinking. Such thinking will not only need to embrace cultural diversity, but will also need to reform the concept of reason itself. This thinking has been underway for some time. It may be indicated by the turn from science to language as the central issue of philosophy, since language is contemporaneous with the human race and inherently resists being put on a new rational foundation. Ludwig Wittgenstein put this attraction of language to contemporary philosophy into the metaphor of a city. ‘Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses’.

We have come to suspect that the straight streets, regular houses, and suburban sprawl that stand for modern rationality is a dead-end street, a street that needs to be revivified by living culture in its diversity. It is with this background in mind that I want to pose in contemporary terms the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation.

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Notice that I am not saying that the identity of Europe was constructed by modernity. The prior elements as an identity is not independent of the homogenising tendency of modernity. The identity of commonality experienced by the newly modernising ‘traditional’ culture with the centres. Now that the phenomenon of modernity has spread from its European origin to influence every culture in the world, the pressure towards modernisation is often seen as a pressure towards Europeanisation – more often called Americanisation – that comes from ‘outside’. To the extent that the pressure to modernisation is seen as coming from outside, the protection of cultural identity often involves a retreat from outside to inside, a phenomenon that occludes, or even expels, the pressures toward homogenisation and modernisation ‘inside’. Both temporal and spatial relations are constitutive of any culture subject to modernisation, though one or another may dominate depending on the degree of commonality experienced by the newly modernising ‘traditional’ culture with the already modernised centres.

One cannot write at the present time without an intense awareness of one dominant contemporary form in which the retreat to ‘inside’ tradition against modernity manifests itself. The anxiety about cultural homogenisation has become for some a panic about modernity which has led to the rise of Fundamentalism in all major religious traditions. Fundamentalism consists of the attempt to escape the anxiety of the loss of identity by turning back the clock prior to the arrival of modernity and believing in the letter and detail of revealed truth. The deep problem here is that an attempt to turn the clock back to tradition is not the same as tradition itself, which evolved and mutated in its own time. The panic for escape from modernity freezes, or attempts to freeze, an invented tradition. It does not discover tradition itself. It wants to reject modernity root and branch, especially the rise of individual conscience and secularism, at the same time that it uses the results of modernity – mass media, the internet, weaponry, state and international finance – to bolster its invented base-line in the past. Such Fundamentalism is locked in a death-dance with unrepentant modernity, a modernity that attempts to expel its own anxiety in a mirror-form to that of Fundamentalism. They both seek without hope of arrival an end to anxiety and, for this very reason, do not face up to the question of our time, but intensify it in the moment that they seek to escape it.

It is not enough to point to the particular European origins of this conception of rationality to establish that it is culture-bound and non-universal. Every phenomenon in human existence comes into being at some historical situation under particular, and probably unique, circumstances. Unless we were to deny any universality at all to any historical human experience – a position that I will not address now, but one that is internally incoherent – we have to accept that such universality does not emerge all at once, simultaneously everywhere. In fact, the emergence of universally human possibilities from determinate particular circumstances provides a ground for an internal critique of the claim to universality. To be truly universal it must shed the merely contingent features of its historical emergence. Thus, a process of self-criticism is initiated that drives modernity – understood as a claim to universality rooted in reason – forward. This dynamism can be deeply unsettling and produces an internal tendency to anxiety which is not identical to that experienced by those who experience modernity as an external imposition, but which has some of the same roots.

**The Industry of Material Culture**

I hope to have said enough to establish that there is an anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation due to the conception of reason as (quickly stated) ‘subsumption under a rule’ that characterises modernity. But it is not clear why this conception of reason has grown beyond its original boundaries, first unifying Europe under the sway of its most modern, urban, industrial areas and then transforming the rest of the world in its image. The planetary civilisation currently emerging has developed from this conception.
toward homogenisation, not actual homogenisation itself, which produces the anxiety, since one can always point to some existing cultural difference. Moreover, the tendency toward homogenisation would not be of great concern if it were thought to be a marginal, remediable or temporary phenomenon. It is thus significant that the homogenising tendency in modernity is based on its conception of reason, not, say, on the arbitrary dictates of a given king. A third aspect of the anxiety can be added to its temporal dimension and its deep-rooted character: that which arouses the anxiety is central to the human being as it is conceived within a culture. Reason is an aspect of humanity for most humans everywhere, but for Europeans that pervasive significance of the definition of humans as ‘rational animals’ made famous by Aristotle is central to the notion of Europe itself.

For cultures centrally committed to rationality as the human essence, a homogenising tendency based in reason is a source of deep anxiety since it involves two aspects of what one understands oneself to be: a rational animal like all other humans in this rationality and a human being of a particular sort due to participation in a given culture that may be disappearing. Reason, central to the human essence, is feared to be the agent of a homogenisation that would deprive humans of their particular way of being humans.

In emphasis at least, this anxiety manifested itself in Europe as a temporal relation, a relation to the traditional beliefs and practices of one’s past that situated it as different from another culture. However, it should be recalled that the construction of Europe as an identity is not independent of the homogenising tendency of modernity. The centres of metropolitan life most committed to modern rationality exerted a pressure on the more traditional rural areas so that the pressure to modernise was not only temporal in relation to one’s past but also spatial in invoking a relation between powerful centres and marginal areas. These temporal and spatial relations were often compacted insofar as the rural areas undergoing modernisation were seen as ‘catching up’ with the centres. Now that the phenomenon of modernity has spread from its European origin to influence every culture in the world, the pressure towards modernisation is often seen as a pressure towards Europeanisation – more often called Americanisation – that comes from ‘outside’. To the extent that the pressure to modernisation is seen as coming from outside, the protection of cultural identity often involves a retreat from outside to inside, a phenomenon that excludes, or even expels, the pressures toward homogenisation and modernisation ‘inside’. Both temporal and spatial relations are constitutive of any culture subject to modernisation, though one or another may dominate depending on the degree of commonality experienced by the newly modernising ‘traditional’ culture with the already modernised centres.

14 Notice that I am not saying that the identity of Europe was constructed by modernity. The prior elements of the Greek rational animal and the self-definition of Christendom as a relation to God provided an earlier basis of unity. But with the rise of modernity these were transformed into a unity based on scientific-technological reason, so that European identity in the modern period is imbricated with, or ‘not independent of’, the homogenising tendency of modernity.

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of reason. Nevertheless, the characteristics of modernity already elaborated do not, in my view, account for the spread of modernity. It is one thing to trace a phenomenon back to its emergence in order to clarify its features and surrounding concepts (as I have done thus far); it is another to address the question of why a phenomenon has come to predominate, not only where it arose, but in other societies which did not give rise to it. It is here that the question of capitalism, which I postponed at the outset, can be seen to be the decisive factor. Capitalism has been the vehicle whereby the features of modernity have been exported and imported such that the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation has become global.

Capitalism is an economic system that, at its origin and in its development, is a de-traditionalising force since it progressively reorganises ever-widening domains of human life through relations of exchange. Capitalism begins as a social system, rather than a circumscribed tendency, when labour becomes an exchange value. ‘For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer’. Labour is thereby torn from all relations of personal dependency and community ownership in which it was embedded and organised through the labour market by payment in wages. The surplus value (profit) that is accumulated through industrial capitalism leads to huge concentrations of wealth and power that, in our own day, characterise global corporations more powerful than many nation-states. The expansionary and anti-traditional nature of these two basic characteristics of capitalism as an economic system – constantly changing the form of production to increase the concentration of wealth – provide the motive power through which the characteristics of modernity have become planetary. Without asserting any priority or causality between capitalism and modernity, certain symbiotic features of them should be noted: 1) a reliance on ‘rationality,’ that is to say a certain concept of rationality, oriented to efficiency and causal explanation that is intrinsically individualistic, or atomistic, and destructive of community property; 2) correlative concepts of tradition and nature as ‘irrational,’ as mere existence without internally articulated reason or value (without ‘final cause,’ or goal, in Aristotelian terms); and, 3) an institution of new time against the past; the past denigrated in favour of constant innovation; the future as the locus of orientation and expected satisfaction. These internally related characteristics shared by modernity and capitalism have allowed their synthesis a distinctive power in undermining other social orders around the globe in a similar manner to which this was previously achieved in Europe.15

As an economic system, capitalism was in the first place oriented toward the reorganisation and development of directly economic goods, but it has expanded over approximately the last hundred years to the realm of culture, which is has reorganised and rationalised on the same principles. We may distinguish three stages of culture under capitalism.16

The culture of early industrial capitalism was oriented around the class relations of the workplace which yielded a class culture of the working class on the one hand and the capitalist class on the other (as well as surviving remnants of aristocratic and peasant culture). They performed different activities in different places while consuming different goods for different purposes. At the beginning of the 20th century capitalist enterprises began to control not only production processes but also the market in which they were sold. Increasing production of consumer goods required a sufficient number of buyers. To achieve this, workers had to be turned away from their traditional class-based activities and entertainments toward those that depended upon manufactured consumer goods. Advertising was a key element of this process. Mass produced culture, the culture industry, operates through differential access to the same sphere of goods. It thus levels class culture and constructs an enclosed sphere of social identities through homogeneous cultural expressions produced as commodities. Since the 1960s there has been a further change due to the influence of mass media, the explosion of new technologies, the global reach of cultural industries, etc. which has often been called postmodern culture or the information age. Leaving behind the homogenisation produced by the culture industry in polemical rejection of class culture, the process of postmodern culture is the production of staged difference: social identities, which are marked by their difference from other identities, are simulated through the circulation of images produced as commodities by global cultural industries.

Obviously, this description of the expansion of capitalism could be expanded considerably, but the upshot in this context is that it is the expansive dynamic built into capitalism through which modernity, as I described it above, became a global phenomenon. Global capitalism, as an economy embracing both material production and culture, uproots all remaining traditional elements and subjects them to the industry of material culture. However, the global culture industry guarantees that the process of cultural homogenisation is now overlaid by the staging of cultural differences.

16 I am actually skipping over an important factor here, that Marx called ‘primitive accumulation,’ in order to focus on the expansion and export of capitalism. But both prior to and coincident with such export, it was necessary to conquer lands who were outside the sphere of nascent capitalism and appropriate pre-existing wealth (i.e. plunder) to remove the possibility of such areas remaining independent. Marx gives the example of the ‘clearing of estates’ in Scotland. ‘The spoliation of the church’s property, the fraudulent alienation of the State domains, the robbery of the common lands, the usurpation of feudal and clan property, and its transformation into modern private property under circumstances of reckless terrorism, were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation. They conquered the field for capitalistic agriculture, made the soil part and parcel of capital, and created for the town industries the necessary supply of a “free” and outlawed proletariat.’ Karl Marx, Capital, Vol I, pp. 732–3. While those dispossessed in this process dream of their land becoming London or New York, in reality it becomes like that of Highland Scotland.
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An Allusion to Issues of Multiculturalism and Secularisation

The anxiety concerning homogenisation is a pervasive feature of our world. It has now been complicated by being overlaid by an anxiety that cultural difference is being staged and does not correspond to the ‘authentic’ aspirations of a living culture – however difficult it might be to define such authentic features. Many features of recent political and cultural life can be seen as responses to this complex anxiety. I would like to briefly mention two phenomena: multiculturalism, both in Canada and elsewhere, and secularisation. In this context I can only allude to these phenomena, each of which has been subject to extensive discussion. But my purpose is not to intervene in these debates here but rather to clarify a conceptual issue about the contemporary significance of cultural diversity.

Due to the large number of distinct cultural and national groups that have recently immigrated to Canada, and various other features of Canadian political culture, a rich discourse concerning multiculturalism has emerged which, among other things, produced the Federal Multiculturalism Act (1988). Without addressing the many specific issues that this discourse incorporates, it is possible to suggest that there are currently two dominant positions: one that claims that multiculturalism, though perhaps insufficient and in need of criticism and improvement, is an advance over the idea of a nation-state that assumes or enforces cultural and/or religious homogeneity among its population. Another claims that such cultural diversity is in reality a sham, that it functions by arraying ‘ethnic’ identities to order and domesticate them with reference to a supposedly non-ethnic, naturalised, identity that is Canadian without qualification. As I reported elsewhere, I recall someone saying to general assent at a conference organised by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in 1984 that ‘The government’s idea of multiculturalism is like Disneyland’.

Canadian multiculturalism would be the heir of the ethnic-racial hierarchy deployed by the British Empire in this case. This second position has the advantage of pointing out that elimination of cultural difference is not the only mode through which a homogenising culture can work. Cultural homogenisation is also at work, more insidiously but also more pervasively, if certain cultural differences are seen as deviations from an assumed norm. In this case, diversity is domesticated by being confined to a surface phenomenon incapable of addressing the deeper tendency towards homogenisation. This position has become quite influential on the international scene also through Slavoj Žižek’s claim that ‘the “real” universality of today’s globalisation through the global market involves its own hegemonic fiction (or even ideal) of multiculturalist tolerance, respect and protection of human rights, democracy, and so forth; it involves its own pseudo-Hegelian “concrete universality” of a world order whose universal features of the world market, human rights and democracy, allow each specific “life-style” to flourish in its particularity’. There is no doubt that this subsumption of culture, and the diversity of culture, beneath a unifying logic of state or economy is one meaning of recent multiculturalism. It remains, however, to ask whether the staging of culture is the whole of multiculturalism. The anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation and the staging of difference would have us ask: what would it mean to be multicultural all the way down?

I want to make a related remark on secularisation. Secularisation is widely thought to be an inevitable consequence of the form of rationality inherent in European modernity. Secularisation involves the death of God and thus empties, or leaves undetermined, the transcendent position in relation to which all immanent positions can be ordered and in which they culminate. Loss of transcendence leaves the field of identity and difference within which a culture defines itself in relation to another culture to be determined within the field of culture itself. The diversity of human cultures is no longer seen as a set of variations possible in relation to a human universality defined by its relation to the sacred source. After secularisation, cultures are understood to gain their identity in relation to cultures from which they are different and obtain this difference through the assertion of their identity. The tendency toward cultural homogenisation leads such differences in the direction of greater superficiality or separation from the human essence as such. The search for identity within a field of difference that is cut off from universality necessarily threatens to lead toward the phenomenon of Fundamentalism mentioned earlier. Although Fundamentalism is usually thought of as a religious phenomenon, it can now be seen to be a much deeper tendency rooted in modernity itself. If Fundamentalism loses the sense that the offending other humans are genuinely human also, it partakes in a cultural field that is essentially secular. Similarly, to the extent that apparently secular thinkers criticise the absolutisation of cultural differences, they appeal beyond the cultural field itself to a human universality. Such human universality may not be thought in religious terms, but it nevertheless occupies the same space as religious transcendence in relegating cultural particularities to species of the genus. A secular cultural field thus necessarily leads to a phenomenon that Sigmund Freud identified as ‘narcissism in respect of minor differences’ in which ‘it is always possible to unite considerable numbers of men in love toward one another, so long as there are still some remaining as objects for aggressive manifestations’.

18 My discussion is over-simplifying in one crucial respect. I do not distinguish here between multiculturalism understood as state policy, social reality or normative ideal. If one makes these distinctions then the two positions remain but may be complicated considerably. One may claim, for example, that multicultural policy does participate in this colonial heritage, whereas the social reality is not enclosed within it, and normative ideal may be taken beyond it.


21 Sigmund Freud (1994) Civilization and Its Discontents, trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Dover, p. 42. It is remarkable that Freud saw this phenomenon as ‘a convenient and relatively harmless form of satisfaction for aggressive tendencies’. However, when he comes to remark on the service that Jews have rendered
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The anxiety concerning homogenisation is a pervasive feature of our world. It has now been complicated by being overlaid by an anxiety that cultural difference is being staged and does not correspond to the ‘authentic’ aspirations of a living culture – however difficult it might be to define such authentic features. Many features of recent political and cultural life can be seen as responses to this complex anxiety. I would like to briefly mention two phenomena: multiculturalism, both in Canada and elsewhere, and secularisation. In this context I can only allude to these phenomena, each of which has been subject to extensive discussion. But my purpose is not to intervene in these debates here but rather to clarify a conceptual issue about the contemporary significance of cultural diversity.

Due to the large number of distinct cultural and national groups that have recently immigrated to Canada, and various other features of Canadian political culture, a rich discourse concerning multiculturalism has emerged which, among other things, produced the Federal Multiculturalism Act (1988).18 Without addressing the many specific issues that this discourse incorporates, it is possible to suggest that there are currently two dominant positions: one that claims that multiculturalism, though perhaps insufficient and in need of criticism and improvement, is an advance over the idea of a nation-state that assumes or enforces cultural and/or religious homogeneity among its population. Another claims that such cultural diversity is in reality a sham, that it functions by arraying ‘ethnic’ identities to order and domesticate them with reference to a supposedly non-ethnic, naturalised, identity that is Canadian without qualification. As I reported elsewhere, I recall someone saying to general assent at a conference organised by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in 1984 that ‘The government’s idea of multiculturalism is like Disneyland’.19 Canadian multiculturalism would be the heir of the ethnic-racial hierarchy deployed by the British Empire in this case. This second position has the advantage of pointing out that elimination of cultural difference is not the only mode through which a homogenising culture can work. Cultural homogenisation is also at work, more insidiously but also more pervasively, if certain cultural differences are seen as deviations from an assumed norm. In this case, diversity is domesticated by being confined to a surface phenomenon incapable of addressing the deeper tendency towards homogenisation. This position has become quite influential on the international scene also through Slavoj Žižek’s claim that ‘the “real” universality of today’s globalisation through the global market involves its own hegemonic fiction (or even ideal) of multiculturalist tolerance, respect and protection of human rights, democracy, and so forth; it involves its own pseudo-Hegelian “concrete universality” of a world order whose universal features of the world market, human rights and democracy, allow each specific “life-style” to flourish in its particularity’.20 There is no doubt that this subsumption of culture, and the diversity of culture, beneath a unifying logic of state or economy is one meaning of recent multiculturalism. It remains, however, to ask whether the staging of culture is the whole of multiculturalism. The anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation and the staging of difference would have us ask: what would it mean to be multicultural all the way down?

I want to make a related remark on secularisation. Secularisation is widely thought to be an inevitable consequence of the form of rationality inherent in European modernity. Secularisation involves the death of God and thus empties, or leaves undetermined, the transcendental position in relation to which all immanent positions can be ordered and in which they culminate. Loss of transcendence leaves the field of identity and difference within which a culture defines itself in relation to another culture to be determined within the field of culture itself. The diversity of human cultures is no longer seen as a set of variations possible in relation to a human universality defined by its relation to the sacred source. After secularisation, cultures are understood to gain their identity in relation to cultures from which they are different and obtain this difference through the assertion of their identity. The tendency toward cultural homogenisation leads such differences in the direction of greater superficiality or separation from the human essence as such. The search for identity within a field of difference that is cut off from universality necessarily threatens to lead toward the phenomenon of Fundamentalism mentioned earlier. Although Fundamentalism is usually thought of as a religious phenomenon, it can now be seen to be a much deeper tendency rooted in modernity itself. If Fundamentalism loses the sense that the offending other humans are genuinely human also, it partakes in a cultural field that is essentially secular. Similarly, to the extent that apparently secular thinkers criticise the absolutisation of cultural differences, they appeal beyond the cultural field itself to a human universality. Such human universality may not be thought in religious terms, but it nevertheless occupies the same space as religious transcendence in relegating cultural particularities to species of the genus. A secular cultural field thus necessarily leads to a phenomenon that Sigmund Freud identified as ‘narcissism in respect of minor differences’ in which ‘it is always possible to unite considerable numbers of men in love toward one another, so long as there are still some remaining as objects for aggressive manifestations’.21 Insofar as we now occupy a secular cultural field, we are driven to ask

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18 My discussion is over-simplifying in one crucial respect. I do not distinguish here between multiculturalism understood as state policy, social reality or normative ideal. If one makes these distinctions then the two positions remain but may be complicated considerably. One may claim, for example, that multicultural policy does participate in this colonial heritage, whereas the social reality is not enclosed within it, and normative ideal may be taken beyond it.


21 Sigmund Freud (1994) Civilisation and Its Discontents, trans. Joan Riviere. New York: Dover, p. 42. It is remarkable that Freud saw this phenomenon as ‘a convenient and relatively harmless form of satisfaction for aggressive tendencies’. However, when he comes to remark on the service that Jews have rendered
for the ground for distinctions of identity and difference. My schematic presentations of
the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation, and the anxiety that cultural difference is
staged by a still homogenising though often invisible source, have been intended to clarify
the contemporary issues involved in such a classical question.

Concluding Remarks about Critical Reflexion on Difference

The initial configuration of modernity and capitalism renders traditional sources of
meaning irrelevant for the modern world. This produces an anxiety concerning cultural
homogenisation, and a related anxiety for the staging of cultural difference, which is the
experiential source for the development of a critical conceptual vocabulary. Haunting
such a vocabulary, especially in the current intellectual climate, is the difficulty of fixing a
meaning for the notion of an ‘authentic’ cultural meaning. First, a word on the notion of
being authentic: a cultural meaning is not authentic in and of itself but could be authentic,
or become authentic, by being incorporated into local culture. Authenticity is then
another way of saying that the cultural practice occurs in tandem with social critique and
decolonisation. So a definition of authenticity as such is not needed. What is needed is an
account of a critical vocabulary that can ground such a cultural practice. I will conclude
by contrasting the dominant Hegelian vocabulary with a phenomenological one, not to
suggest that a critical theory adequate to contemporary practice is already available, but
to suggest in what direction it might be found.

Modernisation and the tendency toward cultural homogenisation, including the staging
of difference, brings about a new appreciation of tradition. This observation in its turn
motivates the thought that modernisation came from somewhere and was, in the final
analysis, a product of tradition. Thus, it is often suggested, the opposition between
modernity and tradition is really a dialectical opposition whose tensions are worked out
in time. Through history, modernity and tradition are reconciled. We might call this the
Hegelian concept of reflexion after its master practitioner. It contains several problems,
however, which render it unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of our contemporary issues.
It does not speak to the position of those pulled into modernisation as an external force,
whether within Europe or beyond – those for whom the spatial dynamic predominates. To
them, it suggests that while modernisation may be mitigated by elements of tradition, the
path forward is nevertheless one of modernisation. Hegelian reflexion cannot but identify
itself with the forward march of history and take it for granted that whatever is valuable
in tradition will be preserved on the ground of modernity. The same observation may be
made about those who do not occupy the commanding positions of modernisation. They
are drawn into it by the power of others and are not likely to be as well reconciled to the
verdict of history as those for whom modernisation is an internal imperative. In addition,

the Hegelian synthesis does not raise sufficient questions about the form of reason in
modernity itself. It overcomes this form through its own dialectical form of historical
reason, to be sure, but it does not criticise this form of reason itself. It overlays a second
reflexion on the first, but the first reflexion must be, and remain, as it is.

Phenomenological reflexion operates in another fashion. It does not move progressively
forward over the insufficiencies of modernity but brushes backward against the grain
to uncover its instituting motifs. It traces modern reason back to Galilean science in
order to uncover the substitution of mathematical forms for the world of experience with
which it began. In Husserl’s words, ‘there has never been a scientific inquiry into the way
in which the life-world constantly functions as subsoil, into how its manifold prelogical
validities act as grounds for the logical ones, for theoretical truths’.22 Modernity thus
must be understood as involving the distinction between science and lifeworld and also
their reciprocal relation, an understanding that complicates, but considerably improves,
understanding of the modern concept of reason. Second, phenomenological reflexion
undoes the progressive assumption in the dialectical reconciliation of modernity and
tradition. Progress can be attributed to scientific knowledge but the effect of science
and technology on the experienced lifeworld has cultural dimensions that produce the
tendency to homogenisation and therefore cannot in itself be seen as progressive. In the
flattening language of social science, culture cannot be seen as simply a dependent variable
driven by scientific reason. It is thus through phenomenological reflexion that I would
expect that the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation and staged difference can be
adequately addressed. I will conclude with two short remarks on how I would propose
to do so.

It was expected of modern reason that it would lead to the truly human, because rational,
condition through knowledge of both nature and society. However, once one has thought
through the formalising abstraction at the root of modern mathematics, it can be seen that
modern reason has become a formal patterning that is divorced from any goals tied
to the realisation of the human essence. One is forced to re-evaluate the possibilities of
ground-up reasoning about human goals apart from formal reason and enter the material
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mathematisation of the lifeworld by Galilean science allows a distinction between what we have heretofore called ‘tradition’ and the experienced lifeworld. The practical context of the lifeworld was hidden under tradition prior to modernity because the material principle under which knowledge and action were unified produced a unified, theologically-based, purportedly universal, understanding of the world – what Max Scheler called a ‘relative natural conception of the world’.24 Thus, the phenomenological critique of modern reason needs to be reconciled not with tradition as such but with the practical context of the lifeworld.25

Even mentioned as quickly as this, one may ask how are such shifts expected to address the anxiety concerning cultural homogenisation and staged difference. First of all, it undercuts entirely the still pervasive and corrosive assumption that modernity is the locus of reason and that all other lifeworlds are reason-poor by comparison – an assumption that is muted though not rejected by the Hegelian vocabulary. The critique of formal reason reinstates the material reason in lifeworlds. It does not do so in an exclusivist fashion, however, which is characteristic of tradition – which relies on an over-arching conception of the world. The lifeworld, on the other hand, is open to competing definitions of how it should be understood and thus promotes social debate on the good life insofar as it can be pursued in a given context. It is this debate – which is no longer traditional but neither is it modern in the sense of unalloyed devotion to formal reason – that undercuts the anxiety concerning homogenisation and staged difference. If we can be liberated of the anxiety, we can live our condition in its tragedy and possibility, as humans have always lived it, and devote ourselves to pursuing human universality from within the opening, not confinement, of our particular way of life.


The Homogenisation of Urban Space

Modjtaba Sadria

Political and urban social movements have used the city as an agent of social and political innovation in the search to construct an alternative social order and a different sense to construct the right to the city.

David Harvey, ‘Right to the City’ (2006)

This paper attempts to bring together three sets of arguments related to homogenisation and urban space. The first explores the relationship between modernisation, homogenisation and the public realm, while the second considers the modernisation of urban space in contemporary cities. The third argument looks at the dimensions of life politics that can bring about the possibility of heterogeneity.

The traps of contemporary social sciences and humanities are many when we attempt to both refine conceptual frames and confront social realities. In order to avoid at least some of these traps, I should state that although I have used in some of my work the framework of postmodernism/postcolonialism, I intend here to remain within the discussion of modernities.1 If I am to use this approach to discuss homogenisation and resistance against it, I also need to define the very specific concept of modernity2 as I intend to use it here. With all due respect to colleagues who are most opinionated on theories of modernity and modernisation, I want to clearly distinguish between the two by stating that I will be using modernity in line with the approach of late (and very early) modernist thinkers as the social recognition of human autonomy with all its potential implications for reflexivity and self-reflexivity. This departing point allows us to explore the possibilities of modernities, which includes an opening for re-thinking and understanding the creation of a


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new sense of the public realm, whether conceived of as the public sphere, or as a space for living together both institutionally and psychologically. It also includes an opening for the formation and transformation of subjectivity, through which the individual and collective appropriation of real and symbolic spaces becomes possible.

In opposition to this specific definition of modernity, I use a similarly narrow definition of modernisation, which refers here to the processes through which macro-actors, such as the state or major corporations, attribute to themselves the authority to define the agenda, priorities or aims of society. They do this by expropriating its peoples, capacities of imagination and initiative, and reducing them to a human force whose sole purpose is to execute this agenda. Thus, any consideration of homogenisation and heterogenisation must include an analysis of power relations. Who is benefiting from these processes? What are the possibilities for effective dissonance towards this use of power? Homogenisation and heterogenisation are not considered here as ontological concepts, but as reflections of social realities and the power relations within them. Specifically, in relation to the built environment and lived environment, are we witnessing through homogenisation, power relations that support the levelling off diversity and resistance and reduce cities to structures that function solely for the increasingly compact organisation of capital and knowledge? And, do these processes of homogenisation also lead to a psychological and semiotic rush towards forms as finalities? Or, are we in the process of empowering people, through the same institutions of homogenisation, to get involved in enriching urban life?

In other words, if we consider institutions such as education, is it possible for us to live with levels of homogeneity that support diversity, heterogeneity and the development of human potential?

**Modernisation, Homogenisation and the Public Realm**

Modernisation, experienced in the form of imposed ‘openness’ to global flows of signs and capital, has now become a global phenomenon. As Wittrock argues, ‘modernity is a global condition that now affects all our actions, interpretations and habits, across nations, interacting with civilisational roots we may have or lay claim to’. Modernisation, in other words, comes to be imposed as a single and unitary phenomenon travelling through global circuits of knowledge, finance, production, tourism, migrations, culture and communications across the world. Modernisation and globalisation are understood as a confluence of forces putting into motion transformative energies that replace universality with universalisation.

There are negative and positive aspects to this process. What has been termed ‘globalisation from above’ may be experienced in terms of cultural imperialism, whereby the homogenising drive of global cultural industries flattens out cultural differences. It may also be experienced in terms of a logic of privatisation, through the penetration of hyper-capitalism that threatens the public sphere that supports the expression of difference, encounter, free association and autonomy, and allows a space to negotiate how people live together. The uncontrollable speed and dynamism with which this confluence of globalisation and modernisation plays itself out in non-Western urban contexts seems to pose a serious challenge to the idea of public interest and democratic culture. Under these circumstances, and as a consequence of the logic of ‘globalisation from above’, it may be said that the inadequate provision of modernity – with its subjects, institutions and structures protecting public benefit and access – puts severe pressure on the city as a democratic public realm.

At the same time however, more positive and potentially innovative developments are also occurring, associated with the dynamics of what may be termed ‘globalisation from below’. These developments include the increasing level and quality of information and critical up to date knowledge, a greater consciousness of the need for different ways of looking at human relations, as well as the relations between humans and nature. The economic dynamics of globalisation have also given rise to increasing transnational networks of people searching for new forms of solidarity, and engaging in different kinds of transnational flows of goods, media, information and so on. These new and various global mobilities have brought with them new kinds of diversity and complexity, involving new patterns of cultural articulations, encounter, exchange and mixing. Experiences of the globalised world – whether as an overwhelming exercise in accumulating material wealth, or as an opportunity for improving our way of being in the world – can now also be retold as the ‘vernacularisation of modernisation’. There is a silent revolution in what may be termed ‘the provinces of the world’, where the top-down approach to modernisation and the concomitant homogenisation of culture and identity that this project endorsed, is now paralleled by a process of vernacularisation. And, crucially, these new forms of diversity and complexity are at the same time located in space that is transnational and translocal in nature, and functions across national frontiers and different urban spaces. The problematic cannot be reduced to a ‘globalised versus parochial’ dichotomy, but must take into account different motivations, logics and content of translocal interactions.

Some of these movements could be defined as facilitators of the multitude of modernities. As S. N. Eisenstadt puts it, ‘the undeniable trend ... is the growing diversification of the understanding of modernity, of the basic cultural agendas of different modern societies – far beyond the homogeneous and hegemonic visions of modernity prevalent in the 1950s’. Or, as Arjun Appadurai observes, ‘the monopoly of autonomous nation-states over the project of “modernisation” has broken down and “modernity” now seems more

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practical and less pedagogic, more experiential and less disciplinary than in the fifties and sixties, when it was mostly experienced (especially for those outside the national elite) through the propaganda apparatuses of the newly independent nation-states and their great leaders.5 We may say then that the monopoly of the state and elites in dictating the norms, aesthetics and codes of contemporary life are increasingly being challenged and relativised by ordinary people in their appropriation and reworking of modern logics. Within these new forms of modernities, therefore, there are certainly present resistant trends that have become conscious of what can be achieved through dialogical interactions between form and content. These movements look for originality, locality and insertion in specific social and physical fabrics, and thus work to heterogenise representations.

The ‘vernacularisation’ of modernity is most apparent and acute in urban contexts. Here we can see and experience most intensely the contemporary challenge of living together in our cities and societies. In many ways this is the challenge of vernacular modernity to the elitist, statist and disciplinary modernisation of the 20th century. The (top-down) push towards the homogenisation of representations and the (bottom-up) countermovement towards empowerment through representations, as well as their consequences for the public sphere, are most visibly contested in the condensed sphere of the city.

The Modernisation of Urban Space in the Contemporary City

The city constitutes a public space where all kinds of intimate or distanciated interactions and encounters of everyday life take place. As Gole has noted, it is the space of the ‘circulation of a universal code of modernity as well as [its] particular significations and practices’.6 Everything has been concentrated and accumulated into cities in the context of modern capitalism: people, capital, commodities, desires, information, signs, images, power and strategies.7 Cities have been constructed as the centralities of politics, economy and culture.

Here I choose to build my argument around some of the core constructions of Henri Lefebvre, though I am aware of the controversies surrounding his work. However, Lefebvre has the advantage of having grasped both the dynamics of homogenisation and its logic, and identified the areas of life politics where it has become possible to resist homogenisation and even to give birth to new heterogeneities. Lefebvre predicted that the process of urbanisation would be completed in the future, and indeed, our society seems to be increasingly characterised by complex, urbanised lives.8 Contemporary urbanisation has historically been promoted since the beginning of industrialisation in the late 19th century and continues unabated in our society.9 The speed of this transformation has been greatly accelerated during the last 100 years. In recent decades this has been facilitated by the advent of information technology, which evokes the transition of the economic system from Fordism to post-Fordism and the transnationalisation of enterprises and people. This had led to the increasing concentration of global flows of capital, information and people into cities10 at a speed that human beings have never experienced before in history. It could be said that we live in a hyper-urbanising society in the context of the reconstruction and formation of new compact capital.

The explosion of the urban population on a global scale has been accompanied by the production of homogeneous urban spaces in these cities. This has occurred at different rates since the late 19th century. Such urban spaces include suburban houses, apartment complexes, shopping malls, skyscrapers and motorways. These increasingly connected, homogeneous urban spaces have absorbed the population and resources, and have functioned as sites of cybernetic control through the homogeneous representations of urban life promoted in advertisements, in the discourses of educational programmes, and through mass media and journalism.11 The state has, according to Lefebvre, organised the production of those urban spaces for capital accumulation, accelerating urbanisation and controlling its flows.12 The urban ideologies of aesthetics without ethics propagated by those in power tend to promote both consumerism and entrepreneurship based on ‘individualism’, attempting to convert people into immoderate consumers and active

12 Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution; Lefebvre, ‘Right to the City’; Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
practical and less pedagogic, more experiential and less disciplinary than in the fifties and sixties, when it was mostly experienced (especially for those outside the national elite) through the propaganda apparatuses of the newly independent nation-states and their great leaders.\textsuperscript{5} We may say then that the monopoly of the state and elites in dictating the norms, aesthetics and codes of contemporary life are increasingly being challenged and relativised by ordinary people in their appropriation and reworking of modern logics. Within these new forms of modernities, therefore, there are certainly present resistant trends that have become conscious of what can be achieved through dialogical interactions between form and content. These movements look for originality, locality and insertion in specific social and physical fabrics, and thus work to heterogenise representations.

The ‘vernacularisation’ of modernity is most apparent and acute in urban contexts. Here we can see and experience most intensely the contemporary challenge of living together in our cities and societies. In many ways this is the challenge of vernacular modernity to the elitist, statal and disciplinary modernisation of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The (top-down) push towards the homogenisation of representations and the (bottom-up) countermovement towards empowerment through representations, as well as their consequences for the public sphere, are most visibly contested in the condensed sphere of the city.

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\textsuperscript{12} Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution; Lefebvre, ‘Right to the City’; Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
be transformed into spaces of resistance through the promotion of creative differentiation and contradiction. These spaces entail the possibility of new kinds of social, cultural and political practices.

The Urban as a Place of Desire

Firstly, the urban is defined as a place of desire. Desires have been concentrated in the city, along with acquisition and production of knowledge, and the accumulation of capital, people, information and commodities. In the city, desires are distorted into ‘needs’ through urban ideologies that contain both homogeneous representations of the ‘good life’, through concrete entities such as money, exchange value, commodities and skyscrapers, and through the headlong rush to commoditise everything. However, desires cannot be completely absorbed into consumption needs, which tend to be calculable in terms of exchange value. Desire cannot be so, because it seeks a quality and use value which is not necessarily, nor is it entirely measurable. Through desires people imagine the city as a utopia, which Lefebvre conceives of as both non-place, but also a possible place. This half-fictional and half-real utopia becomes a primary element of the urban, motivating people to seek to restore the balance of the urban in favour of quality of life, and pushes them towards the reappropriation of urban space. Therefore, it is in the urban sphere that people strive to transform the existing city into a new or alternative city.

The Urban as a Place of Differences

The second definition of the urban is as a place composed of an ensemble of differences. Differences are accumulated and socially produced and reproduced within and through the urban. In other words, differences converge in the urban and are multiplied by it. Though hegemonic power tries to neutralise produced differences and integrate them into its own system (POS), they tend to resist homogenisation and integration. They actively transgress the norms of the system. By gathering together differences, abolishing the distances among them, and connecting them together in a unity, the urban promotes and engenders new differences within itself. In this sense, in urban space people possess ‘the freedom to produce differences’ as their fundamental right. This freedom creates the possibility of the urban being a place of creativity and poiesis, which led Lefebvre to conceptualise the urban as a kind of ‘second nature’. The urban as a unity of differences tends to transform existing social relationships and activities through constant differentiation. Therefore, when Lefebvre refers to the intensification of the urban, he means in part

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13 Ibid.
14 Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution; Lefebvre, ‘Right to the City’.
15 Ibid.
16 Lefebvre, ‘Right to the City’, p. 131; Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution, p. 176.
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18 Ibid., p. 174.
19 Ibid., pp. 174–175; Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 368.
workers in the name of ‘individual freedom’, for the purpose of maximising their own profits.

Assigned the program of producing such urban spaces by state or local governments, urban planners, developers, and architects consciously or unconsciously produce homogeneous urban spaces as the active sites for capital accumulation, and I would add, symbolic and political control.13 Their efforts contribute to increasing the profits for capitalist enterprise by producing urban spaces that support capitalist growth, and by purporting to be facilitators of a ‘better life’, or posing as ‘doctors’ of peoples’ spaces and lives.14 Therefore, urban spaces not only accommodate the population, but also act as strategic sites for exercising the hegemonic power of state and capital. In other words, we can see urban space as the site of exploitation and alienation of people by a network of financial, political, bureaucratic, and technocratic powers, national governments, local governments, developers, urban planners and journalists, through strategies that aim to produce a higher density of capital and power. Paradoxically, this entails forms of social engineering that in urban spaces tend to encourage fragmented human bonds, homogenised lifestyles, and the hierarchical organisation of individuals.

However, if urban spaces are the strategic sites of hegemonic and homogenising power, can they not also be seen as the sites of counter-strategies, creativity and heterogeneity? At the everyday level, can the practices of inhabiting urban space culminate in wider movements towards ‘globalisation from below’ and a vernacularisation of modernity? How can inhabitants become agents of social change, and reappropriate those urban spaces that have historically been expropriated and homogenised through modernising strategies? How can urban spaces become emanations of different expressions of human dignity and solidarity?

Urban Life and the Ingredients for Multiple Modernities

According to Lefebvre, there remains the possibility of urban space becoming the site for challenging, contesting, and even subverting hegemonic power. This possibility can be enhanced by what he termed the intensification of the urban,15 a concept that we will explore in greater detail below. However, first of all, we need to clarify what is meant by ‘the urban’. It can be defined in four ways: 1) as a place of desire, 2) as a place of differences, 3) as a place of encounters and gathering; and 4) as a place of contradictions and conflicts. As I will argue in the following discussion, though all four aspects are important in Lefebvre’s thinking, it is the final definition of urban space that takes centre stage in his conceptualisation of revolutionary urban space. In his view, urban spaces can be transformed into spaces of resistance through the promotion of creative differentiation and contradiction. These spaces entail the possibility of new kinds of social, cultural and political practices.

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the consolidation of the unity of differences and the acceleration of differentiation. He considers this movement to be at the foundation of any quest to an alternative city.

**The Urban as a Place of Encounters**

Thirdly, the urban can be regarded as a place of encounters and a place people come together. In doing so, they share their ideas, thoughts, and experiences in shared and invented spaces such as the café, street, square and park. This sharing process is completely different from the process involved in commodity exchange, where there is no affect-laden communication, but rather strategic communication for the purpose of consuming goods or making a profit. On the other hand, in the sharing process of urban encounters there is an enjoyment of communication, detached from exchange value. In this sense, the urban comes to contain the quality produced by affect-laden communication; it is composed of a qualitative continuum of encounters and active communications. Hegemonic power seeks to fragment this continuum, and flatten its quality in order to make people quiet in the city. Homogenisation here is a clear strategy of power. However, this repression tends to proliferate the networks of encounters and communications, and unite them. Therefore, according to Lefebvre, the intensification of the urban means promoting gatherings and shared encounters which enhance the possibility of creating and articulating heterogeneity in the context of an alternative city.

**The Urban as a Place of Contradiction and Conflict**

The fourth definition of the urban is as a space of contradiction and conflict. The urban contains various kinds of contradictions: between use value and exchange value; desires and needs, squandering energies and consumption, differentiation and homogenisation, encounter and isolation, networking and segregation, equalisation and hierarchisation, appropriation and domination and so on. Those contradictions are closely interrelated. Hegemonic power attempts to forbid or reduce encounters in the urban and to segregate people in terms of private property and exchange value, while also homogenising difference, and manipulating desire through urban ideologies. However, the more the hegemonic power attempts to invade urban sphere, the more intensively contradictions emerge. People have the desire to create something new, and to experience encounters and connection with others. They cannot be solely satisfied with the reality, illusion, and expectation of increasing their wealth, consuming commodities and enhancing their status. But it is through creating original œuvres, expending their energies in festivals, and passionately communicating with one another in certain appropriated spaces that they achieve a sense of well-being. Thus, desires clash with the intervention of hegemonic power within the urban, which seeks a univocal space.

People are in no way passive and quiet in the urban. They insist on their right to differentiation, the right to gather together, the right to appropriate and use urban spaces for their own enjoyment. That is, they forcefully demand the right to the city. In a multitude of ways they criticise the domination of urban spaces by state and capital and reject social fragmentation, the homogenisation of urban space and lifestyle, and hierarchical organisation of society. They strive to construct an alternative order, in which the urban environment and their place within it are transformed according to their desires and based on democratic procedures. That is, they attempt to construct a new city through urban democracy.

In this sense, the urban is the place of conflict. The intensification of contradictions leads to the intensification of conflict. Plural networks formed through encounters converge rapidly. The actions of these solidarity networks lead to resistance, and promote the praxis of reappropriating parts of urban space. Thus, the intensification of the urban implies the promotion of contradictions and conflict between the network of citizens and the hegemonic network of capital and state. It also implies a proliferation of solidarity networks characterised by radical pluralism. According to Lefebvre, it is through this struggle that the alternative ‘ephemeral’ city would emerge.

While attempting to clarify the concept of the urban, this discussion has also outlined what is meant by the intensification of the urban: the intensification of desire towards an alternative city; the acceleration of differentiation through unifying multiple differences; the promotion of encounters and gathering together; the intensification of contradictions and conflicts. These four processes are interrelated in complex ways. At first, when desires are concentrated and intensified within the urban, a superfluity of energies accumulates around the desires. After the energies are sufficiently concentrated, they explosively erupt, which results in the production of differences in the urban. Next, encounters in the urban are brought about by the desire for connection, and further energies are accumulated through interactions with others. Encounters contribute to the communication of desires and accumulation of energies, and promote the production of differences and heterogeneities. All the processes mentioned above can be seen as the differential movement of the urban. This differential movement promotes the contradiction between use value and exchange value; that is, it serves to valorise use value and de-valorise exchange value, while homogenising forces tend to move in the opposite way.


25 Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution.

26 Lefebvre, The Production of Space.
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20 Lefebvre, ‘Right to the City’, p. 117 and 131; Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution, p. 118.
21 Lefebvre, The Urban Revolution, p. 121.
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Therefore, increased differentiation in the urban produces heightened contradiction and conflicts. In so doing, the urban is intensified in diverse ways.

The Appropriation of Space by the Living Body

In the process of differential movement, people are appropriating urban spaces through concrete spatial praxis. In other words, urban space is produced through encounter, communication and social action, mediated through the body. People walk, run, move their hands, speak, express their desires and feel the rhythms of the movement of other bodies in space. When people resist the production of homogeneous urban spaces this counter-action is embodied in a concrete way in physical space; counter-space is produced. Lefebvre calls this body the living body. By virtue of the spatial praxis of living bodies, both spaces of enjoyment and spaces of resistance come to be concretely generated within the urban. Here I shall focus on the dynamics of the living body as the generator of space as well as the appropriator of space.

How does the body differentiate and appropriate space? Lefebvre argued that this is achieved by generating living unity. Living unity is a dynamic process that produces differential space. The creative capacity of the living body and how it produces living unity and differential space can be understood through five classifications: 1) spatio-temporal body, 2) differential body, 3) polysensorial body, 4) polyrhythmic body, and finally, 5) metaphilosophical body. The body that unifies these five forms can generate living unity.

(1) Living Body as Spatio-temporal Body

Lefebvre rejected the dominant epistemology of space in modern society based on geometry and the thinking of Descartes, and instead depicts the living body through the anomalous epistemology of space as espoused by Spinoza, Leibniz and Nietzsche. For him, the living body is itself a part of space. It occupies the space and has the capacity to produce the space for itself through its energies. On this point he argues, ‘Can the body, with its capacity for action, and its various energies, be said to create space? Assuredly… there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body’s deployment in space and its occupation of space… each living body is space and has its space: it produces that space’. Thus, the living body not only exists in space, but it is also actively engaged in space. It appropriates and uses the space for its own pleasure and joy. The appropriation of space can be defined as the spatial praxis of the body which ‘is lived directly before it is conceptualized’. This property of the body is the spatial body.

It should be noted that the appropriation of space by the living body is both a spatial and temporal process. As Lefebvre describes, ‘time is distinguishable but not separable from space. The concentric rings of a tree trunk reveal the tree’s age, just as a shell’s spirals, with their ‘marvellous’ spatial concreteness, reveal the age of that shell’s former occupant… Space and time thus appear and manifest themselves as different yet inseparable’. Similarly, an artist creates works of art, which are materialised through the use of the artists’ hands and certain tools, and in doing so produces space qualified by their imagination and inspiration. In other words, time is inscribed in the space. The living body, which has both characteristics of spatiality and temporality, is the spatio-temporal body.

By virtue of the fact that the living body actively engages in the appropriation of space and the production of space within time, the body creates a living unity between itself, space and time. Such living unity can be regarded as the organic unity between spatiality and temporality. Moreover, an important point here is that living bodies immediately encounter one another in that organic unity, connect with the movements of other bodies, and create a new unity. Here, ‘external is…internal inasmuch as the other is another body, a vulnerable flesh, an accessible symmetry’. And through this unity, living bodies continuously appropriate urban space and differentiate it. In this process, they continue to intensify living unity.

(2) Living Body as Differential Body

Secondly, the living body is also the differential body. This signifies that it is actively producing differences that are something new. In this sense, the living body has the capacity to innovate. According to Lefebvre, the superfluity of energy plays a decisive role here. At first, the living body needs to capture, accumulate and concentrate energies in a specific place in order to carry out the production of difference. In short, it gathers massive energies for creative action, a process that is, according to Lefebvre, laborious and repetitive. Little by little the living body accumulates energy in the context of repetitive, everyday life. The body is then able to initiate the process of differentiation at the precise moment when the available energies become so abundant that they can be discharged, producing ‘unpredictable’ differences. At the same time, through these differences the living body transforms itself into a new body and generates a new space. Finally, after the available energies are completely expended, the transformed body once again enters into the laborious activity of a new type of repetition in order to accumulate the energies...
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\(^2^7\) Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 30; emphasis added.

\(^2^8\) Ibid.

\(^2^9\) Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 170; original emphasis.

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\(^3^1\) Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 174.

\(^3^2\) Ibid, p. 177.
In this way it can differentiate and diversify itself and its own space.

Lefebvre argues that the engine that powers the process of capturing and discharging energies is desire. Without desire, there would be no creative cycle of repetition and differentiation. Though desire is originally undifferentiated, it urges the body to initiate the process of accumulating energies and producing differences. This is the desire to squander energies, to create something new, to appropriate space, and to enjoy the process of differentiation in festivity. According to Lefebvre, this desire corresponds to Eros and the Grand Desire referred to by Nietzsche, and it is entirely different from the desire that is mentioned by theologians and such psychoanalysts as Freud. The desire is dialectically connected to an individual's needs for survival, but always attempts to transcend those needs. It urges the body to put a priority on itself, life and use value, and to master needs, survival and exchange value. Motivated by desire, the body organises and connects everything in its environment by means of accumulation and accumulated energies. The energies create diverse linkages between the past self, the present self and the future self; between the self and its body; between the body and its surrounding space; and between the body and other's bodies. These multiple linkages form a living unity. Desire not only produces differences and differential spaces, but also harmoniously connects all differences and differential spaces. It produces the living unity as a unity of differences.

(3) Living Body as Polysensorial Body

Thirdly, the living body can physically perceive space through multiple senses, such as smell, taste, touch, sight and hearing. Lefebvre explains this capacity to perceive space by invoking the following image: “When “Ego” arrives in an unknown country or city, he first experiences it through every part of his body – through his senses of smell and taste, as... through his legs and feet. His hearing picks up the noises and the quality of the voices; his eyes are assailed by new impressions. For it is by means of the body that space is perceived, lived – and produced”. It is easy to imagine this kind of experience that Lefebvre describes: in the park, one hears the voices and laughter of children, the song of a street musician, feels the flow of wind and warmth of the sunshine and smells the freshly cut grass. In this way, one’s body physically perceives and experiences the quality of space in multiple ways through the senses. Thus, one’s living body can be considered a polysensorial body which perceives space in the here and now.

In the process of perceiving space, the body creates a living unity between itself and space, which is composed of the sensory qualities of that space. It also contains the dynamic continuum of the lived experiences of the body that perceives these qualities. This living unity may be deemed a unity of qualities or a unity of lived experiences. In generating qualitative unity, bodies are interacting with each other and appropriating space. This unity occupies and flows dynamically in space, and through it the living body differentiates space.

(4) Living Body as Polyrhythmic Body

The body can be also seen as polyrhythmic body. The living body ‘senses’ the multiple rhythms of space in the process of perceiving the space. The quality of space includes the dynamic flow of diverse rhythms of the body and that space. The rhythms are always differentiating, diversifying and overlaying themselves upon the rhythms of other’s bodies, of nature, the seasons and the surrounding world. Lefebvre explains that ‘rhythms in all their multiplicity interpenetrate one another. In the body and around it, as on the surface of a body of water, or within the mass of a liquid, rhythms are forever crossing and recrossing, superimposing themselves upon each other, always bound to space’. Each body has multiple rhythms – polyrhythm – and combines its internal rhythms (such as breathing, the heartbeat and facial expressions) with the external rhythms (such as the rhythms of day and night, music, ocean waves or city life) which are flowing around the body. The combination of internal and external rhythms is always in the process of perpetual diversification and differentiation. The boundaries between the internal and external are at any time ambiguous and indistinguishable; they are moving within and around the body. The rhythms of each body are unique and singular, and every rhythm is polyrhymic. Thus, the living body can be said to be fundamentally polyrhythmic. It differentiates space through the differential movement of multiple rhythms that it creates. It appropriates space through perceiving and capturing the dynamics of the differential movement of multiple rhythms that exist outside of it. According to Lefebvre, this process can be accelerated by music and festivals, which promote people’s interaction through the intensified dynamics of polyrhythm.

As noted above, the bundle of diverse rhythms connotes a living unity itself. The unified and ceaselessly transforming polyrhythm within and around the body is an organic unity that consists of the body, other bodies, space and nature in their temporality: ‘unity in diversity’. Multiple rhythms are simultaneously interconnected with one another, preserving the diversity and differences in the unity. Lefebvre also argues further that ‘each one of us is this unity of diverse relations whose aspects are... oriented towards the outside,

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34 Ibid, p. 394.
37 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, p. 205.
38 Lefebvre, Rhythmanalysis, p. 77.
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34 Ibid, p. 394.
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towards the Other and to the World.\footnote{Ibid., original emphasis.} He goes on to say ‘it is in the psychological, social, organic unity of the “perceiver” who is oriented towards the perceived, which is to say, towards objects, towards surroundings and towards other people, that the rhythms that compose this unity are given’.\footnote{Ibid.} Hence, this unity can be regarded as a \textit{unity of polyrhythm}, which endlessly differentiates and diversifies space.

\section*{(5) Living Body as Metaphilosophical Body}

The final characteristic of the living body is that it has its own \textit{intelligence}. The source of the intelligence is at first, according to Lefebvre, knowledge constructed through self-reflection on the lived experiences of the body,\footnote{Lefebvre, The Production of Space.} made up of the cycle of repetition and differentiation, capturing and discharging energies, and perceiving the quality of space through multiple senses. The living body becomes able to better judge what are the sources of its own pleasure and joy, or danger and sadness, in its immediate milieu.

In this sense, the knowledge of the brain is deeply connected to the ‘practico-sensorial realm’ of body, which is space itself. The knowledge produced by self-reflection is not a pure and rational knowledge of the Cartesian \textit{cogito}, which is detached from the action of the body and space. The knowledge is always combined with the praxis of the body through dialectics between the body and mind, which Lefebvre calls \textit{metaphilosophy}. Metaphilosophy involves self-reflection but at the same time, goes ‘beyond philosophy’ and directly links with lived experiences and the spatial praxis of the body.\footnote{Ibid., p. 368.} Lefebvre calls this kind of knowledge connaissance. Thus, the intellectual activity of the living body produces connaissance. Connaissance is fundamentally connected to desire, and motivates the body to imagine future realms of possibility, radically criticising the ‘existing’ self and the ‘existing’ space.\footnote{Ibid.} Therefore, the living body can be understood as a \textit{metaphilosophical body}, which imagines a lived space that is both utopian but at the same time exists as the very heart of reality.\footnote{Ibid., The Urban Revolution.} This was for Lefebvre the most fundamental aspect of differential space.

\section*{Appropriating Space through Voice and Speech}

All these elements contribute to activate the living body. But how then does the living body achieve the appropriation of space? The living body appropriates space not only through capturing and discharging energy but also through the act of speaking what it desires, imagines, and contemplates in the process of metaphilosophy. According to Lefebvre, the produced space can be called the \textit{space of speech} which is animated with the impassioned thought, dialogue and multiple voices of diverse living bodies.\footnote{Lefebvre, The Production of Space. p. 403.} This dialogue includes both self-critical knowledge and critical knowledge about others, social relations and the existing order. The space of speech involves discussions on how to produce a new space, based on desire and an imagined possible future, and oriented around the enjoyment and quality of life. In this way, it is a \textit{space of the affirmation of life}.\footnote{Ibid., p. 201.} Living bodies therefore appropriate and differentiate space through voice and speech.\footnote{Technological breakthroughs will also have impacts on the effective choices in both the built and lived environment in relation to these differentiations.}

In differentiated space, multiple living bodies are connected with one another, enmeshed in a network mediated by speech. A living unity emerges, in which living bodies express and share their ideas, and also, create new ideas. In doing so, they appropriate and transform existing space into a new space which is, by its very nature, the space of ethical concerns in which everyone can participate and be empowered while generating new solidarities.

\section*{Conclusion: The Production of Counter-space}

Homogenisation works mainly through a certain reified view of life and possibilities of living together. However, such reductionism requires pressure, manipulation and oppression of the population in order to achieve an interiorised and homogenised view of life, society, space, forms, and their interactions. What role then, does appropriated and differentiated space play in the context of the contemporary city? As we have seen, the intensification of urban life results in living bodies being able to feel the quality and rhythms of space more intensively, to produce differences and new spaces more energetically, and to

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Photo credit: Reza Masoudi}
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speak with one another more passionately. Additionally, the intensity of contradictions and conflicts within the urban becomes more acute. The more intensively differences and contradictions are generated, the more actively hegemonic power attempts to extinguish those differences and contradictions, because they are, or might be perceived as an obstacle to building structures for univocal social, cultural, economy, and political processes. The key strategies for doing so include the normalisation of urban ideologies and the production of homogeneous urban spaces. However, the attempts to control living bodies ultimately produce fresh and more acute contradictions. It is important to note here that a non-essentialist view of homogenisation and heterogenisation in built and lived environments needs to take into account the contextually specific modes of vertical integration as well as any resistance to it.

These strategies are resisted through critical knowledge, the promotion of encounters and dialogue, interactions and the experience of multiple rhythms in festivity. Through the production of counter-spaces they demand the right to appropriate space, and to use it for their enjoyment and fulfilment. In other words, they demand the right to the city. In doing so, people struggle against the authoritative power within the city, and reject the segregation and hierarchical organisation of their networks, as well as the homogenisation of their lifestyles. From this perspective, the city and the urban sphere can be seen as ‘the setting of struggle’ against brutal spatial planning and homogenised urban spaces. What is important in this struggle is the awareness that each person, architects included, potentially has the energy and desire to transform the city and ensure genuine quality of urban life.

Based on my understanding of Lefebvre’s profound insights, how can we interpret the various conflicts taking place in the contemporary global city? Conflicts in the city seem to contain an enormous possibility to reverse the hegemony of mega-actors and states. This stems from the fact that many urban inhabitants are aware of the brutality of the hegemony that ignores their quality of life; people are producing differential spaces and counter-spaces through spatial praxis. These solidarity networks are virtually and actually expanding, intensifying, and multiplying the sense of urbanity. They promote the imagining of an alternative city, an alternative way of living in the city, in which everyday life and urban spaces are ceaselessly transforming through different urban realities, and vice versa.

On the one hand, the power relations implicit in the mechanisms discussed by Lefebvre demonstrate the top-down, vertical, exclusionary processes that operate in urban life. On the other hand, these power relations highlight the human will and capacity throughout moments of social history to redefine, and reappropriate the way they wish to be and live in the city. These represent the two major forces that shape and reshape the multitude of urbanities, and strengthen either homogenisation or heterogeneity in built and lived environments.

Is it wise, considering the arguments made above, to think that the conflicting agendas in the city, borne from a multitude of urban subjectivities, will provide the necessary energy to sustain both processes of modernisation as well as policies inspired by a recognition of multiple modernities? Moreover, how will postmodern and post-colonial ethics be integrated into urbanism and the architectural mental landscape? Can we, as public intellectuals, advocate for an understanding of urban subjectivities that remain vivid, fluid and critical at the same time? This might be the challenge if one aspires to let the flow of life, desire, and creativity be incorporated into, but also move beyond, current intellectual and scholarly horizons.
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Some weeks following the Knowledge Construction Workshop that was convened by the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in Vancouver in February 2009, those of us who had participated in it were asked by Modjtaba Sadria to expand on the presentations we made there, and in doing so, to focus on two specific questions. These were:

What are the contemporary social, economic, political, cultural, historical mechanisms that lead towards homogenisation and heterogenisation of the built environment, and what are the implications for the lived environment?

and

What are the contemporary social, economic, political, cultural, historical mechanisms that lead towards homogenisation and heterogenisation of the lived environment, and what are the implications for the built environment?

In my contribution to the February workshop in Vancouver, I had attempted to elucidate the relationship of design intention to the architectural unconscious, in the processes of homogenisation of representations in architecture. That is to say, I argued, if it is true that homogenisation is caused by such factors as the ‘mobility of influential people teaching in faculties of architecture and urbanism’, by ‘scholarly networks and journals with strong editorial policies’ and by ‘the growing presence of symbolic buildings being conceived and built by largely the same networks’, I claimed that this process of causation is one that is at least as much ‘unconscious’ as ‘intentional’. I confessed at the outset my realisation that this inclination of mine was, in substantial measure a consequence of the fact that I began my career in architectural theory with an exploration of the possible uses in architecture of Fernand de Saussure in the early 20th century. In particular, Saussure argued that any

References


1 These ‘factors’ had been cited by Dr. Sadria in a statement of the themes he wished participants in the workshop to pursue, several months prior to it taking place.