

# Manuel Delgado's Urban Anthropology: From Multidimensional Space to Interdisciplinary Spatial Theory

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"Una antropología urbana, en el sentido de lo urbano, sería, pues, una antropología de configuraciones sociales escasamente orgánicas, poco o nada solidificadas, sometidas a la oscilación constante y destinadas a desvanecerse enseguida [...] una antropología de lo inestable, de lo no estructurado, no porque esté desestructurado, sino por estar *estructurándose* [...]"

—(Manuel Delgado, *El animal público* 12, original emphasis)

"Though all the photographs of a city taken from all possible points of view indefinitely complete one another, they will never equal in value that dimensional object, the city along whose streets one walks."

—(Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind* 160-61)

**A**s spatial theory spreads from the social sciences into the humanities—from geography into literary circles—it becomes important to recognize spatial theory itself as an interdisciplinary area of investigation, one that shares significant methodological concerns with literary analysis and philosophical inquiry. Through the articulation of urban anthropologist Manuel Delgado's texts with key problems from the writings of Jane Jacobs, Susan Sontag, Juan Benet, Henri Bergson, and Henri Lefebvre, this essay argues that urban criticism depends on the humanities as much as the humanities need spatial theory. The result is stronger support for the Lefebvrian argument that to change the quality of urban life it is necessary to change the *process* through which space is perceived, conceived, and produced and, ultimately, to change the movement of thought itself.

Taken as a whole, Manuel Delgado's *El animal público* and his two conferences (edited for publication) "Memoria y lugar: El espacio público como crisis de significado" and "Tránsitos: Espacio público y masas corpóreas" are important contributions to the contemporary study of urban spaces.<sup>1</sup> In these works, Delgado builds upon the fundamentally multidimensional view of space articulated by Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*) while emphasizing space as a process over the reification of given spaces. Moreover, throughout Lefebvre's and Delgado's works there is a strong Bergsonian undercurrent that points to the differential unity of memory (representative of consciousness) and space (understood as matter) and consequently to the interconnection of philosophical, anthropological, and geographical concerns. This interconnection is just as crucial in approaching the complexity of 'public' and 'private' city-spaces as it is in restructuring the hard lines of disciplinary borders and in renovating the aims of traditional scholarship.

Delgado's contribution to studies of space is in fact an enfolding of Lefebvre's triadic model of spatial productions and Bergson's non-dualistic spatial and temporal philosophy. This amalgam of paradigm shifts, digested as they are from the realms of geography and philosophy, suggests as much for the study of space as it does for the reconceptualization of the very idea of 'space' itself. Incorporating the phenomenological questioning of perceiver and perceived into a superb materialist critique of capitalist spatial practices, Delgado draws together the imagined and physical aspects of our spatial production. The consequences of this type of scholarship cannot be overemphasized given the contemporary accelerated drive for capital accumulation through the production and reproduction of city-space

(Harvey, *Condition; Justice; Spaces*). Urbanism suffers, in Delgado's (2001) words, from the need to "architecturalize everything"/ "arquitecturizarlo todo,"

[c]omo si la tarea en última instancia colonizadora del urbanista tuviera como su peor enemigo la tendencia que todo espacio socializado experimenta hacia la ambigüedad, hacia la indefinición, como consecuencia de la propia naturaleza indeterminada de los usos que registra. (*Memoria* 8)

In what follows, I want to emphasize the above premise of Delgado, one that he shares with Lefebvre and Bergson, that process enfolds and includes the particular—that immaterial forces enfold and include material forces.

I will first show how Delgado's urban anthropology, one that poses the question of public space as a central one, unites immaterial and material forces in a non-dualistic relation. I argue that this special theory of geographical processes is not far at all from the way innovative critics of art and literature, such as Susan Sontag and Juan Benet, have dissolved the clear distinction between form and content in favor of a more complex view of the product of artistic process. This is no mere literary diversion, but rather leads back into the key methodological questioning of recent geographical theorists who have grappled, once again, with the very definition of public space.

Subsequently, starting from Delgado's twin-focus on both historical memory and memory understood as a philosophical problem of consciousness, I will follow the urban anthropologist's insightful mention of Bergson out of his text and into the work of Bergson himself. This path will provide an opportunity to assess the similarity of

Delgado's urban model of the relation of immaterial and material forces with Bergson's own such philosophical model. In the context of urban studies, Bergson's complex model of space and time is best understood, not as mere philosophical abstraction, but rather as an articulate and thorough exploration of the very problems that cultural geographers face today. Ultimately, Bergson's philosophical look at space becomes a precursor for Henri Lefebvre's watershed text *The Production of Space*, which in turn forms an important bulwark for Delgado's process-oriented anthropology.

While it may prove tempting to view the following essay as somewhat cursory when considered from any one scholarly tradition, what I am proposing is altogether different. The point is not merely, as Delgado's work implies, that urban problems are also anthropological problems, but moreover that the problems of urban life are the problems of literary criticism are the problems of philosophy and so on. If the problems of today's cities can even be said to *reside* someplace at all, then they are located not in the spatially-constituted material world understood in the simple sense, but in the complex articulation of that world with the immaterial processes they subsequently transform and in that immaterial but significant process par excellence—the movement of thought. I maintain that exposing the methodological similarities that obtain in various disciplinary contexts is important to finding, as Harvey advocates, “new ways of thinking and feeling” (*The Condition* 322) that might challenge stagnant representations of space and time.

### **From form/content to process: Jacobs, Sontag, and Benet**

“Se ha pasado a una preocupación por la forma y el estilo que no sólo viene del arte, sino también del lenguaje publicitario y el marketing.”

—(Manuel Delgado, quoted in *Tramullas* “Esta protesta es una juerga”)

Delgado's work is best contextualized within recent interdisciplinary approaches to urban life. Many of these approaches share the perspective that urban life is poorly understood as a static container for human activity and is better conceived instead as a multidimensional process—variegated and even contradictory. I believe that this multidimensional process speaks to the larger struggles of both city-life and scholarship. This approach to city-space thus steps back from the standard dichotomies that have dominated urban theory through much of the twentieth century. In opposition to previous approaches to the urban that either ignored the specificities of place with a preference for the structural or that zoomed in on locality at the expense of the theoretical, Katarina Nylund characterizes the urban theories of the 1990s as a synthesis of structure and action, of physical and social space, and of space and place (221-23). She thus allies herself with Henri Lefebvre (*Production*) and David Harvey (*Urban; Condition; Justice; Space*), who seek to depart from the discrete polarities of the built environment and of social life, and argues that cultural analyses of the urban “contribute to the development of new knowledge and

understanding of the forces that transform city and urban life” and that they “strive to bring together a structural and action-oriented perspective” (228).

In his prize winning book-length essay *El animal público*,<sup>2</sup> urban anthropologist Manuel Delgado does just that. He draws on thinkers such as George Simmel, G. H. Mead, Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau as well as French and Belgian anthropologists and sociologists (19), classic critics of urbanism—Jane Jacobs and Richard Sennet (19), and the big names in symbolic and ritual anthropology—Émile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gregory Bateson, and Victor Turner, for example (21)—in order to suggest an intriguing reevaluation of our experience of public space. In labeling the anthropology of public space a teratology (16), he from the outset privileges the complexity of public space and cautions against the use of rigid frameworks in the analysis of what is a constant movement. The urban, he argues in a decidedly Lefebvrian, or even Bergsonian fashion as this essay will have chance to assess, is necessarily defined as a process:

Una antropología urbana, en el sentido de lo urbano, sería, pues, una antropología de configuraciones sociales escasamente orgánicas, poco o nada solidificadas, sometidas a la oscilación constante y destinadas a desvanecerse enseguida [...] una antropología de lo inestable, de lo no estructurado, no porque esté desestructurado, sino por estar *estructurándose* [...]. (12, see also 25, 33, original emphasis)

Within this process, public space itself is seen as a negotiation (Delgado, *Memoria* 35), with the real movements of people constituting and reconstituting a shifting

and *produced* boundary between public and private. In a sense, this is a reformulation of Jane Jacobs’s now classic critique of urbanism, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, with its emphasis on the synthesis of both the top-down and bottom-up processes that continuously shape our cities.<sup>3</sup> Urban life is thus produced by both the material effects and structures of urban planning processes and the non-tangible and unforeseeable processes of community building and individual action—two aspects of city-space production that are frequently at odds with one another. Although urban planning, and even urban scholarship for that matter, may view city life through the unmoving window of speculation, working from frozen moments in time toward a static picture of future possibilities which in fact make their very speculation possible, urban life is no simple mechanized system.

Delgado’s characterization of the urban as *process* is built on a subtle yet important distinction between the city and the urban (*Memoria* 9): “La ciudad no es lo urbano” (*El animal* 23). As Bergson surely would have noticed had he shifted his attention to the problems of urban life, this distinction is in fact a difference of kind, and not merely of degree. As such, the city and the urban are best understood as two tendencies of one movement—one tendency material and the other immaterial. The city for Delgado is “una composición espacial,” whereas the urban is a process “sin marcas ni límites definitivos” (*El animal* 23). The interaction between these material and immaterial tendencies, as the reader familiar with urban theory, or philosophy, or literary analysis for that matter is well aware, is nothing short of complex. Somewhat paradoxically, the urban—although indeed a process—is a process that produces a certain kind of regularity in thought and in material spaces.

Delgado moves us to understand urbanism in the following way: “en última instancia como una máquina de homogeneizar y clarificar el medio ambiente urbano” (*Memoria* 11). Yet taking on this perspective of urbanism—that is, the perspective of this machine seeking to homogenize and clarify urban space—requires that one makes a speculative identification between the form of space and the content of space, between the active elements of the production of a given space and the subsequently prescribed activities that will take place within it. It is this machine that urban planners are able to harness to their speculative interests. Delgado denounces this speculative activity:

Todo ello requiere que el proyecto busque sobre todo la congruencia entre forma y actividad, y lo haga a través de la estereotipación y la esquematización de los entornos. (*Memoria* 11, see also Stacheli)

The project of urbanism thus seeks to prescribe and proscribe activities in urban space through a manipulation of the form of that urban space. Its methodology is then to separate the form and content of space from the outset and use these abstracted categories as the basis for the speculative work of urban restructuring.

Nevertheless, in spatial theory as in literary analysis, form and content cannot be considered separately. In fact, none other than Jane Jacobs herself railed against this tendency of urbanism to start from an ontological separation of form and content and drive toward their identification in her criticism of the creation of parks (see esp. 74–88). In a tradition going back to Ebenezer Howard, urban planners have confidently designed parks into city-space, believing that the mere existence of park space itself

will determine the activities that take place within it.<sup>4</sup> Yet, on the contrary, as *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* shows, open park spaces frequently play a role in the deterioration of neighborhoods—and not necessarily their regeneration. Jacobs thus supplies an important corrective to the utopian ideals of the parks movement:

Conventionally, neighborhood parks or parklike open spaces are considered boons conferred on the deprived populations of cities. Let us turn this thought around, and consider city parks deprived places that need the boon of life and appreciation conferred on *them*. (89, original emphasis)

In so doing, she rejects the intellectual tradition of speculative urban planning that separates form from content from the outset and instead emphasizes space as a *process*, a negotiation, a movement. Jacobs’s seminal work explores the inadequacies of the notion that a given section of city-space can be treated as a distinct area apart from larger social customs and economic realities—although it may profit urban developers to proceed as if this were true.

The abstraction of form and content from a unitary—if differentiated—process is a very prominent feature of analysis—considered from an interdisciplinary perspective. That being so, a concise exploration of form and content in literary studies thus exposes remarkable similarities with geographical theory. To the student of literature, Delgado’s observation that urbanism seeks to identify form with activity, space with the activity that takes place within it, resonates forcefully with the long history of practices of formalist literary interpretation. Critics have long probed the literary text in

an attempt to confidently isolate the meaning of a text as something inherent in the content of the text itself, or else given by the text's form. Innovative literary scholarship has, in large degree, renovated the concept of form or the concept of content, yet all the while maintaining their distinctness—seldom calling into question the basis for the construction of these two concepts. Nevertheless, following the lead of Susan Sontag and Juan Benet allows the critic to see beyond this simplistic dualism and ultimately to question faith in the static categories that obscure the analysis of process.

Early in her career, Susan Sontag noted the injustices rendered by the separation of form and content. As she notes in her seminal essay "Against Interpretation," "what is needed is an erotics of art" (23). This conclusion is rendered in order to rectify a flawed conception of art whose genealogy she traces from Platonism. In declaring art an imitation, the mimetic theory maintains that an image of a bed, for example, cannot be real because it cannot be used as a bed. As Sontag explains, this interpretive frame for art is the same lens through which reality itself is viewed, being here implicitly and there explicitly a mere stand-in for impalpable and transcendent essential forms. Because art, and even reality, are then imitations, a defense of art is needed. This defense entails the bifurcation of form from content, and the privileging of the content over the form, the meaning over the situation and manner of presentation. In short, the analytical bifurcation of form and content suppresses the question of the viewer in reifying the work of art. In this way it merely continues the interpretive project through which object and subject are held to be distinct and static components of an analysis whose basic tenets are outside the very possibility of refutation.

At a similar time, the Spanish engineer-turned-novelist Juan Benet drew attention to the schism produced between form and content in his book-length essay *La inspiración y el estilo*. In the chapter titled "Las dos caras de George Eliot," he favors one position—"una unicidad infinita de dicción" (139)—over a second position that sees a clear distinction between form and content. In his opinion, these two positions, one that dissolves the opposition between form and content and one that maintains it "nunca pueden llegar a coincidir"<sup>5</sup> (139). It is Benet who best explains the alternative to an analysis based on either form or content. For him, inspiration comes to an author only when he has a style. A style is not rational, although it includes rationality. A style is "una zona de sombras" that is not reducible to a "razonamiento matemático" like that professed by Edgar A. Poe in *La filosofía de la composición* (cited in Benet 72). **First comes imagination, and later comes analysis**—which can never completely explain its object. Either analysis bases itself on an enigma or else it is "una superchería que difícilmente le podía llevar al descubrimiento de cosas que no conociera de antemano" (72). In shifting the discourse to the question of style, out of which form and content are inevitably abstracted by the intellect, Benet thus escapes a simplistic dualism to underscore both the content of the form and the form of the content (see also White; Herzberger).

This protest against the unquestioned distinction between form and content on the part of Sontag and Benet is no mere literary diversion away from geographical processes, but is rather, in fact, of particular methodological interest to geographers and spatial theorists, whatever their discipline. Delgado (*El animal público*), for one, has characterized the urban as that which has no innate form.<sup>6</sup> In this

vein, cultural geographers of late have asked important questions of method, including of course what is meant by form and content in geographical analysis. Consider Lynn Staeheli's suggested move away from the static paradigms of analysis that equate "the content of action" with "the spaces of action" (601). Far from suggesting an identification of form and content, Staeheli sidesteps any faithful belief in these abstracted static categories in favor of a focus on how these monikers are constructed, how their meanings shift over time and in given contexts, and whose interests they may serve in any given situation. This attempt to avoid the reification of social process is in fact methodologically similar to the attempts by Sontag and Benet to emphasize the larger processes of discourse over the way in which overly-rational systems are traced into those processes, to emphasize the *movements* of social processes over the solid and already determined rationality of traditional analysis. This is ultimately to envision immaterial relations of power as deeply entwined with the material structures traced onto that immaterial field.

This crucial move of scholarship effectively avoids the pitfalls of treating a space as already formed and as having a monolithic and determined meaning or significance. In so doing, Staeheli reinvigorates the possibility of political action while sacrificing none of the importance of a materialist critique of spatial production. Staeheli's lucid critique is a necessary corrective to the simplistic enlightenment rhetoric of theorists such as Arendt who argue for a genuinely public "space of appearance." Most importantly, her bottom line (which for the Hispanist may call up remarks by Mariano José de Larra) underscores the difficulty confronted by the desire for social change. Staeheli writes, definitively, that "the idea of a unitary space (metaphorical or material) for politics in which individual interests are set aside is

impossible" (Staeheli 617; consider Larra: "Before all else, the public is the pretext, the cover, for the private needs of each man" [1832/1975]<sup>7</sup>). Compare this to Delgado's recognition (a la Staeheli) that public space comes to be conceived as:

[un] lugar en que se materializan diversas categorías abstractas como democracia, ciudadanía, convivencia, civismo, consenso y otras supersticiones políticas contemporáneas. ("Espacio público")<sup>8</sup>

Staeheli is certainly not alone. Indeed, geographer Michael Brown has argued that the definition of the public and private spheres is itself a complex act, calling these terms "multidimensional" ("Reconceptualizing" 76) and noting that their meanings vary in relation to the methodological framework in which they are employed (see also Brown, *Replacing Citizenship*, esp. 123-25; Staeheli 603-06; Mitchell, esp. C. 8). In *Queer London*, Matt Houlbrook further emphasizes the shifting nature of the public/private boundary, emphasizing the "interplay between public and private" (54) and suggesting that "public and private sociability [have] often overlapped within the same venue" (75). In short, although the built environment may frame actions, encourage some and discourage others, spaces are in no way determinate containers for action. Rather, in the tradition of Marx's *Capital*, the production of the built environment is but one (albeit important) aspect of a larger process through which power is legitimated and contested.

It is in this sense that Delgado contrasts "the urban" not with "the rural" as a spatializing common sense would have it, but rather with "the communal" (*El animal* 25). Just as Benet's rationality is dependent

on the larger process of style for its own self-production, just as for Sontag, the separation of form and content is wrought out of the larger process of the defense of art, the urban is predicated upon a necessary plurality that it attempts to constrain. This plurality is envisioned to legitimize the process of homogenization. The similarity between Benet's concept of "style" and Delgado's concept "the urban" is apparent. Each in his own way, the literary engineer and the urban anthropologist, has recognized the way that mechanistic thought is dependent on processes that escape its total control while at the same time providing the impetus that makes some degree of this control possible.

A thorough reading of the works of Henri Bergson shows that this mechanistic process is not merely of interest to planners in the high-modernist towers of urban design, but is rather indicative of a larger philosophical question.

Each being cuts up the world according to the lines that its action must follow: it is these lines of *possible action* that, by intercrossing, mark out the net of experience of which each mesh is a fact. No doubt, a town is composed exclusively of houses, and the streets of the town are only the intervals between the houses: so we may say that nature contains only facts, and that, the facts once posited, the relations are simply the lines running between the facts. But, in a town, it is the gradual portioning of the ground into lots that has determined at once the place of the houses, their general shape, and the direction of the streets:

to this portioning we must go back if we wish to understand the particular mode of subdivision that causes each house to be where it is, each street to run as it does. (*Creative Evolution* 367-68, original emphasis)

Here, the philosopher shifts attention from the particular materials of a city to point to the larger process of the production of city-space. This squares well with Delgado's contrast between the city (understood spatially) and the *urban* (understood as process of homogenization). The urban process, then, *is* this very act of homogenizing space—treating space as a homogeneous medium which may then be sectioned off into innumerable parts—this very act of organizing space.<sup>9</sup> Thus for Delgado,

Todo espacio estructurado es un espacio social, puesto que es la sociedad la que permite la conversión de un espacio no definido, no marcado, no pensable—inconcebible en definitiva antes de su organización—en un territorio. (*El animal público* 177)

If space is experienced as already organized—if space is experienced in fact *through* its very organization, then the problem of city-space cannot merely be a spatial problem. This necessitates shifting the discussion from space considered in itself to the relation between space and consciousness, or between matter and memory as Bergson frames it. In the next section I will pursue further the connection between Delgado and Bergson—one that is not wholly explicit, but that is powerful and revealing nevertheless.

## Monumental memory and *Matter and Memory*: from Delgado to Bergson<sup>10</sup>

As part of its mechanistic process, urbanism invites us to adopt its perspective, rooting our experience in paradigms of tourism and visual spectacle whose frameworks are encouraged by our perception of monumental anchors that are tributes to (and catalysts for) past actions, limiting our perceptions to what was instead of what might still be. Delgado proposes that the monument is best understood as:

[una] marca concreta hecha sobre el espacio, un punto de calidad en el cual la ideología o los sentimientos relativos a valores sociales o personales se revelan. (*Memoria y lugar* 19)

This is no casual remark. As we will see, the critic couches this observation in an explicitly philosophical understanding of memory. As such, this statement provides an opportunity to pursue the connections between his urban anthropology and Henri Bergson's philosophy.

Delgado reminds us that the present does not result from the past due to a logical and incontrovertible sequence of events, but rather that what we perceive as the past results from present interests (*Memoria y lugar* 21). This is, of course, the case not only in such simply unmasked practices as favoring one history over another in producing the monumental structures of a city—i.e. the question of whose interests are preserved materially, publicly, governmentally, and culturally at the expense of other interests—but is also the case structurally—that is when considered from a much more

formal, methodological sense. We have seen through Sontag and Benet that the problems of analyzing urban life coincide substantially with the problems of artistic and literary criticism. In fact, the mechanism through which material power entwines itself with immaterial processes and manifests itself in physical structures is not unique to the urban aspect of modern life, but is deeply present in the human experience of memory as a qualitative and inclusive process—a fact of which Delgado is more than merely conscious. He writes:

Los grandes teóricos pragmáticos del recuerdo—G. H. Mead y *Henri Bergson*—, y los epistemológicos constructivistas después, han distinguido dos tipos de memoria: una memoria en scio, por así decirlo, constituida por la totalidad almacenada de evocaciones posibles, y otra memoria extremadamente selectiva, que escoge entre todas las imágenes del pasado disponibles, entre todas las historias posibles, aquellas que mejor se adecúan a los intereses prácticos del presente. (*Memoria* 20-21, emphasis added)

It would be difficult to more concisely summarize the main thrust of Bergson's now classic text *Matter and Memory*. Bergson's philosophy, more than merely treating memory as an isolated object, uses the topic as an illustration of the complicated enfold-ing of the material and immaterial worlds. In this sense, the Bergsonian term “spatializa-tion”—one which refers to the act of understanding qualitative data through quantitative means—resonates powerfully with the spatial theories of Delgado and others.

Take, for instance, geographers Alan Latham and Derek McCormack who, in their article “Moving Cities: Rethinking

the Materialities of Urban Geographies” argue for “a notion of the material that admits from the very start the presence and importance of the immaterial” (703). In *Time and Free Will*, again in *Matter and Memory*, and yet again in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson dissolves from provisional dualisms (of space and time, matter and memory, intellect and instinct) in order to emphasize their union as a composite. The Bergsonian composite is wrought of two tendencies which cannot be isolated from each other. Put most succinctly, the non-dualism is one between “two different kinds of reality, the one heterogeneous, that of sensible qualities, the other homogeneous, namely space” (*Time and Free Will* 97). Thus, although language invites us to consider time and space as distinct or opposed facets of reality (see *Creative Evolution* 298-304), it does not encourage us to think about how it is that our intellectual activity separates one from the other, nor does it clarify how each is implicated at every moment of our perception. Time and space are not concrete things, but are instead two ways of thinking about experience, two entry points onto a temporal-spatial whole. Consequently, each one suggests a certain way of differentiating this whole. Put a different way, there are:

two kinds of multiplicity, two possible senses of the word ‘distinguish,’ two conceptions, the one qualitative and the other quantitative, of the difference between *same* and *other*. (*Time and Free Will* 121, original emphasis)

Yet more importantly than this first maneuver in which Bergson references the two multiplicities, the two tendencies that are themselves abstracted from a unitary if

variegated space-time, is the way he brings up their cohabitation (see also *Matter and Memory* 72):

And yet we cannot even form the idea of discrete multiplicity without considering at the same time a qualitative multiplicity. When we explicitly count units by stringing them along a spatial line, is it not the case that, alongside this addition of identical terms standing out from a homogenous background, an organization of these units is going on in the depths of the soul, a wholly dynamic process, not unlike the purely qualitative way in which an anvil, if it could feel, would realize a series of blows from a hammer? [...] In a word, the process by which we count units and make them into a discrete multiplicity has two sides; on the one hand we assume that they are identical, which is conceivable only on condition that these units are ranged alongside each other in a homogeneous medium; but on the other hand, the third unit, for example, when added to the other two, alters the nature, the appearance and, as it were, the rhythm of the whole; without this interpenetration and this, so to speak, qualitative progress, no addition would be possible. Hence it is through the quality of quantity that we form the idea of quantity without quality. (*Time and Free Will* 122-23)

Here it can already be seen how quality plays a role in quantity, intensity in extensivity, inclusive succession in simultaneity, duration in matter, time in space. As I will explore in the next section of the present essay, this is not so different from what Lefebvre posits in analyzing the *production* of space. It

is not a static moment (space) that deserves attention, but rather the process of creating what at any moment may be taken *by the intellect* as staticity (space-time). This is to rightly deal with process, not product—and process, as Lefebvre, Harvey, and not without significance the Marx of *Capital* all are aware, is by no means entirely spatial.

### Space as process: Lefebvre, Bergson, Delgado

Although Lefebvre had critiqued Bergson's philosophy early on (Elden x), his later work—especially *The Production of Space* but also *Rhythmanalysis* (published posthumously in 1992) and the third volume of *The Critique of Everyday Life*—draws closer and closer to Bergsonism emphasizing the need for the researcher to think in 'lived temporality' (*Rhythmanalysis* 21). Rather than advocating the view of space as a pure extensive medium, Lefebvre wants more and more to fold space into time and offers a revealing suggestion for the methodology of what he calls the rhythm analyst—"Without omitting the spatial and places, of course, he makes himself more sensitive to times than to spaces" (*Rhythmanalysis* 22). This emphasis is no mere experimentation found in his lesser-known works, but is the very methodological core that inspires his view of the 'production' of space. Henri Lefebvre's epic treatise, *The Production of Space*, which may be taken as the impetus for a new wave of interest in space by the humanities, is quite clearly concerned with space in a broad sense and, more importantly, with the way in which we apprehend and make sense of it. Yet even here, as the work's title indicates, space needs be considered in terms of a larger enfolding temporality.

What is of great interest to the humanities is that this work clearly suggests philosophical assumptions play a role in our understanding of space—even if Lefebvre lamentably chooses not to pursue this significant if implicit motivation for his investigation. Early in this crucial work, Lefebvre defines the very problem of space itself in a way, much opposed to his stated intent, that foregrounds the philosophical nature of the spatial question:

What term should be used to describe the division which keeps the various types of space away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap? Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break? As a matter of fact the term used is far less important than the distance that separates 'ideal' space, which has to do with mental (logico-mathematical) categories, from 'real' space, which is the space of social practice. *In actuality each of these two kinds of space involves, underpins, and presupposes the other.*

What should be the starting point for any theoretical attempt to account for this situation and transcend it in the process? Not philosophy, certainly, for philosophy is an active and interested party in the matter. Philosophers have themselves helped bring about the schism with which we are concerned by developing abstract (metaphysical) representations of space, among them the Cartesian notion of space as absolute, infinite *res extensa*, a divine property which may be grasped in a single act of intuition because of its homogeneous (isotopic) character. This is all the more regrettable in view of the fact that the beginnings of philosophy were closely bound up with the 'real'

space of the Greek city. This connection was severed later in philosophy's development. Not that we can have no recourse to philosophy, to its concepts or conceptions. *But it [philosophy] cannot be our point of departure.* (14, emphasis added)

None other than Bergson himself would agree with Lefebvre in insisting upon the philosophical origin of this split, between physical, mental, and social space. Lefebvre clearly opposes philosophy as the point of departure for reconciling these areas—and yet it is precisely because of the fact that Bergson's is an *anti-philosophy*—one which calls traditional philosophical categories into question and which takes it upon itself to explain the origin of philosophical error—that his works are of such great relevance to Lefebvre's goal to arrive at a “[...] unitary theory of physical, mental and social space” (21). What Lefebvre is at a loss to name (“Distortion? Disjunction? Schism? Break?”) is in fact the Bergsonian idea of “space” itself—a method of division, of carving up reality which in itself produces not only physical space, mental space and social space but also their division from one another.<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, it is this very process that Manuel Delgado has termed “the urban.”

Lefebvre's contribution to the discourse of spatial practices, of which David Harvey has been quite fond (*Justice*), is to stress the multi-dimensionality of space. In Delgado's assessment of Lefebvre's contribution, one sees a similar acceptance of multidimensionality.

La premisa lefebvrina es que el espacio social no puede reducirse a unidad alguna, puesto que responde a una pluralidad múltiple y en cierto modo innumerable, cada uno de

cuyos elementos constitutivos se yuxtaponen muchas veces de forma imprevisible unos sobre otros. (*Memoria y lugar* 39)

Thus, if the object of study, space, is multi-dimensional, so too must the study of that object be interdisciplinary. This is to reject the strategies employed by city-planners when they take the city to be a predictable and profitable simple object and opt instead for an appreciation of the complexity and unpredictability of urban life.

Recognizing the complexity of urban life has been a strategy of anti-urbanism at least since Jane Jacobs herself pointed this out:

Cities happen to be problems in organized complexity, like the life sciences. They present ‘situations in which a half-dozen or even several dozen quantities are all varying simultaneously *and in subtly interconnected ways.*’ Cities, again like the life sciences, do not exhibit *one* problem in organized complexity, which if understood explains all. They can be analyzed into many such problems or segments which, as in the case of the life sciences, are also related with one another. (433, original emphasis)

What Delgado, Lefebvre, and Jacobs are suggesting is that this multidimensional quality of city-space makes necessary, as its counterpart, the interdisciplinary quality of spatial theory. This is something that Bergson knew very well. Bergson himself stated that:

We gauge the significance of a doctrine of philosophy by the variety of ideas which it unfolds, and the simplicity of the principle it summarizes. (quoted in Chevalier 74)<sup>12</sup>

A perfunctory comparison of Jacobs and Bergson reveals that in each case the question of method is preeminent. Each emphasizes the definition of the problem itself over the solution to the problem. Although written decades ago, Jacobs's remark remains a poignant critique of the role of the city in contemporary accumulation strategies: "[City-planning] lacks the first requisite for a body of practical and progressing thought: recognition of the kind of problem at issue" (439). In the same vein, Bergson writes that:

The truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of *finding* the problem and consequently of *positing* it, even more than of solving it. (*The Creative Mind* 51, original emphasis)

Thus, the first step to finding and positing the problem of urban life is the recognition that fragmented approaches to what is a shifting process are not enough. This type of scholarship is one that drives toward a full acknowledgement of city-space as process. Such a push not only involves this vision of the city as mobility, but also provides a necessary questioning of investigation itself. Hayden Lorimer argues that:

Of late, non-representational theorists have asked difficult and provocative questions of cultural geographers, and many others in the discipline, about what is intended by the conduct of research. ("Cultural Geography" 83)

These theorists act as "a particularly effective lightning-rod for disciplinary self-critique" (Lorimer 83), because their ontology of process is not limited in scope to the pro-

blems of space conceived of as pure object of research, but instead brings perceptual unity to the notions of space/place, structure/action and city/individual. In order for scholarship to effectively analyze places, it must grapple head-on with how those places are routinely perceived, conceived, produced, and reproduced. Scholarship must recognize that it is not a mere third-party observer of spatial practices, but is actually implicated in the production of space through methodological tropes that it may share with strategists of capital accumulation and urban planners. Nowhere is this more evident than in the analysis of public and private spaces of the city—an aspect of city-space which is, of course, precisely the focus of Delgado's prize winning essay. I would like to return to this issue of public space now in order to show how, in problematizing the use of the concept, scholarship may more precisely approach the implicit intent of such rhetoric—working toward more livable city-spaces.

### **From reified public space to the process of struggle**

It is incontestable that Delgado picks up where Lefebvre left off, inheriting his complex multidimensional model of space and an interdisciplinary approach that leaves no stone unturned. The opportunity given by scholarship of city-space is to recognize that things are not in space. Instead, as key writings of philosophy, cultural geography, and physics have all emphasized, space is in things (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*; Harvey, *Justice*; Hewitt).<sup>13</sup> In this sense, space is not merely an aspect of the city itself, but of theory as well, and of the processes out of which theory and city distinguish themselves (see Fraser, forthcoming).

In this context, the first appropriate step is to admit that the question of public space is a difficult one. This is to follow Bergson's philosophical advice on the proper formulation of questions—one, as we have seen, echoed by Jacobs. In this sort of criticism, the problem of how to posit questions related to public space trumps the more myopic problem of which spaces are public and which are not. Delgado's resulting view refuses to reify public space, but more importantly, questions its very definition.

El espacio público es pues, un territorio desterritorializado, que se pasa el tiempo reterritorializándose y volviéndose a desterritorializar, que se caracteriza por la sucesión y el amontonamiento de componentes inestables. Es en esas arenas movedizas donde se registra la concentración y el desplazamiento de las fuerzas sociales que las lógicas urbanas convocan o desencadenan, y que están crónicamente condenadas a sufrir todo tipo de composiciones y recomposiciones, a ritmo lento o en sacudidas. El espacio público es desterritorializado también porque en su seno todo lo que concurre y ocurre es heterogéneo: un espacio esponjoso en el que apenas nada merece el privilegio de *quedarse*. (*El animal público* 46, original emphasis)

Public space is seen as movement itself—rightly as a *process* instead of a stable location that has somehow disappeared.

The result of this acknowledgment is not that we must stand mute before a crisis of representation, but rather that we need to create a scholarship more closely

tied to action, one more precisely attuned to the shifting material world over which we struggle, one that opens the various disciplines of social life onto one another, and not least of all, one that questions the quick fix of capital accumulation and which formulates the question of urban life in a fashion altogether different from the way in which it has been posed by the proponents of urban design.

This very definition of public space as shifting in itself is no simple escape from materialist concerns, but is instead a radical counter-argument to the discourse of a pernicious urbanism that seeks to overcode and spatialize the city on the path to capital accumulation. At the risk of belaboring the point, the labeling of public and private spaces is the direct outcome of what Delgado terms the urban process—once again, a machine of homogenization whose product is paradoxically the spatialization of difference throughout the city. In a recent article from Madrid's *El País*, Delgado reminds us that:

Para el urbanismo oficial, *espacio público* quiere decir otra cosa: un vacío entre construcciones que hay que llenar de forma adecuada a los objetivos de promotores y autoridades, que suelen ser los mismos, por cierto. [...] No en vano la noción de espacio público se puso de moda entre los planificadores sobre todo a partir de las grandes iniciativas para la especulación, el turismo y las demandas institucionales en materia de legitimidad. (“Espacio público”)

When we rely too much on the term ‘public space’ we thus risk complicity in the plans of urban design.

## Conclusion

When analyzing the production of space, the intent should not be to grasp the solely material things found within space as distinct from a human action relegated to the past, not to show how things reflect a static social organization, but to understand space as a movement of differentiation, as a process which is a spatio-temporal unity which operates through human thought and action, to restore the immaterial to the material and to reclaim a future of possibilities instead of a strict materialist determinism or the panacea of a wandering utopian thought. It is from the understanding of movement, of *process*, that the produced and contested nature of concepts through which individuals and societies reproduce themselves is revealed. The consequences of this approach are far reaching. They involve the whole realm of perception itself. Let us see what sort of scholarship comes from questioning the traditional limits of disciplines. As Delgado, Staeheli, Larra and others seem to suggest, let us see what scholarship may become after realizing that space is not, has never been, and will never be truly public.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The conferences “Memoria y lugar: El espacio público como crisis de significado” and “Transitos: Espacio público y masas corpóreas” were published together in the book *Memoria y lugar: El espacio público como crisis de significado*.

<sup>2</sup> In 1999, the work won the prestigious XXVII Premio Anagrama de Ensayo.

<sup>3</sup> See Delgado for a comparable distinction between “ciudad planificada” and “ciudad practicada” (*El animal público* 182).

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the complex motivations for the constructions of parks in the American context, see Roy Rosenzweig’s *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920*.

<sup>5</sup> Benet’s whole citation reads:

La forma y el contenido son dos conceptos que no admiten congruencia, que no se confunden nunca y que—al seguir cada cual su camino—nunca pueden llegar a coincidir [...] quien persista en la distinción no puede dejar de reconocer que no existe una sola forma de dicción que no establezca una relación de dependencia entre conceptos [...]. (139)

Ricardo Gullón for that matter in “La invención del 98” (15) also talks of “las caducas distinciones entre fondo y forma.”

<sup>6</sup> Se proclama que existe una *forma urbana*, resultado del planeamiento políticamente determinado, pero en realidad se sospecha que lo urbano, en sí, *no tiene forma*. (181, original emphasis)

<sup>7</sup> Delgado himself recalls Larra’s critique—“En el espacio público no hay asimilación, ni integración, ni paz, a no ser acuerdos provisionales con quienes bien podrían percibirse como antagónicos, puesto que la calle es el espacio de *todos los otros*” (189, original emphasis).

<sup>8</sup> The full citation reads:

En este caso, el *espacio público* pasa a concebirse como la realización de un valor ideológico, lugar en que se materializan diversas categorías abstractas como democracia, ciudadanía, convivencia, civismo, consenso y otras supersticiones políticas contemporáneas, proscenio en que se desearía ver pulular una ordenada masa de seres libres e iguales, guapos y felices, seres inmaculados que emplean ese espacio para ir y venir de trabajo o de consumir y que, en sus

ratos libres, pasean despreocupados por un paraíso de amabilidad y cortesía, como si fueran figurantes de un colosal anuncio publicitario. (“Espacio público,” original emphasis)

<sup>9</sup> Delgado points out that “una división clara entre público y privado” (*El animal* 179) is quite important to this process.

<sup>10</sup> The philosopher, in fact, may be experiencing a new wave of attention in critical theory as a recent issue of the journal *Culture and Organization* (9.1, 2003) shows, to name just one example. In their essay “Time Creativity and Culture: Introducing Bergson” Stephen Linstead and John Mullarkey argue for the relevance of Bergson’s work to the analysis of culture. Alexander Styhre’s “Knowledge as a Virtual Asset: Bergson’s Notion of Virtuality and Knowledge Organization” shows the importance of Bergson’s thought to a theory of knowledge as process. Sean Watson attempts to bring Bergson to bear on the analysis of both literature and social groups in his “Bodily Entanglement: Bergson and Thresholds in the Sociology of Affect” (2003). Antoine Hatzenberger’s “Open Society and Bolos: A Utopian Reading of Bergson’s ‘Final Remarks’” likewise finds great relevance of Bergson’s ideas to current and alternative social organizations. Carl Power’s “Freedom and Sociability for Bergson” suggests that “we need to re-evaluate the relevance and value of Bergson’s thought today” (71). Ellen Lee Kennedy, too, deserves mention, as she argues at length for the importance of Bergson to political philosophy:

Bergson’s theory shows that the external world and the person experiencing it are changing. Insofar as the world outside him is recognized as containing other persons, his experience of it also has a social dimension. And, insofar as his experience of the world itself is changing, there is a necessarily problematical element in existence. Thus the problems of individual consciousness have a dimension that involves other minds, and some formulations of those

problems concern the consequences of acting on emotions or feelings when these have other persons as their object. When regarded with a view as to what is good or what is just, these problems become the first questions of moral and political philosophy. (131)

With Bergson’s philosophy properly saved from denunciations of transcendent metaphysics, mysticism, and interiority (see the Introduction of the present work), Kennedy convincingly articulates the immanence of problems of individual consciousness to those of collective consciousness. From this point of view, questions of the fusion of time-space (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*; Harvey, *Justice*; Hewitt) are of great importance to the very definition of spatial problems and the subsequent approach to solving them. In order to take on the complex notion of city-space, urban criticism must acknowledge both the reality of process in shaping the city itself as well as its role in our critical readings of urban struggle.

<sup>11</sup> I believe that Lefebvre’s (implicit) dismissal of Bergsonian methodology, when in fact it would most behoove him to explore it, is itself predicated on two quite common misunderstandings: the first, of Bergson as a philosopher of “time;” and the second, of phenomenology as a study of subjectivity (21-22). Readers grounded in materialist theory (or traditional metaphysics) may want me to prove that there is indeed anything at all materialist about phenomenology (or alternately that there is anything ideal about material reality). I refuse, on the basis that these requests are founded on erroneous conceptions of reality itself. Instead, I insist upon the following significant realization—that just as Bergson sought to correct the errors of a traditional metaphysics, Lefebvre sought to correct the way those same errors had influenced our understanding of space. As long as philosophy remains a conceptual realm displaced from the realm of action, it is indeed useless. Yet a philosophy such as Bergson’s which can account for the cohabitation of action and thought in process, materiality in ideality and the

ideal in the material, is properly suited to correct this wrong. Readers familiar with Lefebvre's engagement with and departure from both the French Communist Party and the Situationist International (see Harvey 1991; Merrifield) before and during the political upheaval of the late 60s will understand further his commitment to creating new social realities utilizing both thought and action.

<sup>12</sup> The note beneath this epigraph from Chevalier's text reads "From the preface written by Henri Bergson for G. Tarde's *Extracts*, published in the series *Les grands philosophes* (Paris, Michaud, 1909)."

<sup>13</sup> Following Bergson's point of view, it cannot be therefore that we are objects *in* space, but rather that this conception of space presents itself as a consequence of the tendency of thought to treat space as a homogeneous medium discretely separable from a temporal medium, an error which is of crucial significance. Through "a view taken by mind" (*Creative Evolution* 157), one conceives of oneself as a being in space, as a thing in a container, rather than as a being in whom there is space. Bergson writes:

A medium of this kind is never perceived; it is only conceived. What is perceived is extension colored, resistant, divided according to the lines which mark out the boundaries of real bodies or of their real elements. But when we think of our power over this matter, that is to say, of our faculty of decomposing and recomposing it as we please, we project the whole of these possible decompositions and recompositions behind real extension in the form of a homogeneous space, empty and indifferent, which is supposed to underlie it. This space is therefore, preeminently, the plan of our possible action on things [...]. (*Creative Evolution* 157)

When referring to space, then, I am speaking of a mode of divisibility that presupposes homogeneity. This approach in fact produces homogeneity as a concept. But I must be even

more clear. Homogenous space does not exist outside of a subject's perception of it, rather the subject *thinks* it through a movement of mind. This homogenous space comes into being when one *intends* to move. Bergson thus rejects the Kantian assumption that space exists *a priori*:

But suppose now that this homogenous space is not logically anterior, but posterior to material things and to the pure knowledge which we can have of them; suppose that extensity is prior to space; suppose that homogenous space concerns our action and only our action, being like an infinitely fine network which we stretch beneath material continuity in order to render ourselves masters of it, to decompose it according to the plan of our activities and our needs. [...] Then, not only has our hypothesis the advantage of bringing us into harmony with science, which shows us each thing exercising an influence on all the others and consequently occupying, in a certain sense, the whole of the extended (although we perceive of this thing only its centre and mark its limits at the point where our body ceases to have any hold upon it). Not only has it the advantage, in metaphysic, of suppressing or lessening the contradictions raised by divisibility in space, —contradictions which always arise, as we have shown, from our failure to dissociate the two points of view, that of action from that of knowledge. It has, above all, the advantage of overthrowing the insurmountable barriers raised by realism between the extended world and our perception of it. For whereas this doctrine assumes on the one hand an external reality which is multiple and divided, and on the other sensations alien from extensity and without possible contact with it, we find that concrete extensity

is not really divided, any more than immediate perception is in truth unextended. Starting from realism, we come back to the point which idealism had led us; we replace perception in things. And we see realism and idealism ready to come to an understanding when we set aside the postulate, uncritically accepted by both, which served them as a common frontier. (*Matter and Memory* 307-09)

This act of spreading a homogenous and divisible space before us is required for movement, and yet one must remember that this act of mind is a tendency, not the condition of being in the world.

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