**W2 Response paper: Political-Economic readings**

A key aspect in this week’s readings is the relationship between place and identity. Harvey attempts to entangle the reasons for why place, a bounded but more or less porous spatial concept, has gained more and more relevance within the politics of our increasingly globalized world (1993). Smith also looks at how claims to places within the public sphere affects identity construction and politics at a variety of levels, from the personal, through the local, to the national (1993). Because I struggled slightly to understand the differentiation between Harvey’s concepts of spatial representations and imaginations, I will use Mathew’s ethnography to attempt to differentiate these concepts.

The representations of a place are socially dominant views and ideas about that place, often represented in public discourse (Harvey: 17). This can be exemplified by the previously very negative media image of the Chungking Mansion within Hong Kong media and public discourse. Discourse shapes our collective ideas about the place in question, but more importantly also our impression of the people who occupy it (Mathews, 2011). Mathews illustrates this tellingly when he applies a gendered lens onto the experience of women within the Chungking Mansion. Due to the representations of the Chungking Mansion as a male-dominated, potentially dangerous place, ‘any young woman wearing fashionable clothes’ would, at least when he began his fieldwork, be perceived and often treated as a sex worker (ibid.: 85). Hence, representations are important tools of power, because they directly impact how we interact with a given place and the people within it (Harvey: 22).

I understand imaginations within the realms of space and place as a more phenomenological concept. Our imaginations of a place are our ideas about that particular place, created as a result of personal experience, associations and perspectives. However, representations and imaginations exist in a dialectical relationship, and inform each other (Harvey: 23). The fact that imaginations can vary greatly across a population, and that it may be very distant from the representation of a given place, is evident in the case of the different ideas about Chungking Mansion. To the African traders, it used to represent empowerment, and hopes of a brighter future, whilst for the children of the Chinese and South Asian property owners it was considered a past left behind on the way to achieving their current successful middle-class status (Mathews: 69). Representations and imaginations are however not simply spatially defined, but also temporally. In the imagination of African traders, Chungking Mansion has increasingly become a pit stop on the way to more attractive business in China (ibid.: 196). Although I am uncertain of whether Harvey would agree with this definition of the imagination of space, I believe that Ingold puts it well when he says that:

‘To imagine, we suggest, is not so much to conjure up images of a reality “out there,” whether virtual or actual, true or false, as to participate from within, through perception and action, in the very becoming of things’ (Ingold, 2012: 3)

**Bibliography**

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