**Response Paper Week 4: Bringing the Approaches Together**

Whilst these accounts seek to unite phenomenological approaches with political economic insights, only two pieces fully engage with embodied and sensory experiences relating to bodily being-in-the-world. The first is Fanon, in his textured description of Algerian women’s use of the veil, which ‘tempers’ the body; without the veil her body threatens ‘to dissolve’ (59). Describing the return to using the veil as a strategic move to conceal packages, Fanon explains that ‘The Algerian woman’s body, which in an initial phase was pared down, now swelled. Whereas in the previous period the body had to be made slim and disciplined to make it attractive and seductive, it now had to be squashed, made shapeless and even ridiculous’ (1963: 62). This pointedly shows that the female body as experienced is produced, meaningful, and historically-situated. Sopranzetti also offers a richly phenomenological description of the experience of riding a motorbike: riding ‘winds, diverges, reinstates, deviates and swerves’. In contrast to Lefebvre’s notion of walking as a linear, performative speech act, for Sopranzetti riding ‘retains a wandering mode, a tentative and always incomplete nature’. It is nonetheless unclear whether this open-endedness is a universal product of some property of the motorbike itself, an experience grounded in the layout and nature of Bangkok’s streets, or some combination of the two. That is to say, would the motorbike offer these same possibilities if traversing the grid-like streets of Los Angeles, in an orderly journey between two points, and within the confines of traffic regulations?

This engagement with phenomenology underscores the effectiveness of these two texts in drawing out contingency and context-specificity. Thus, Fanon charts the shifting use of the veil which is ‘Removed and reassumed again and again…manipulated, transformed’, acquiring new meanings and purposes in time and space (1963: 61). This account resists any unidirectional narrative of historical change. Similarly, Sopranzetti demonstrates the tangible presence of history in the city as lived and represented, avoiding any sense of linear progress. What we see in the filled-in canals that become *soi* is not a coherent text, but best understood as ‘a confused entanglement of scribbles’. The city as lived by motorcycle taxi drivers appears full of precariousness, whether in their closeness to physical danger, or the fragility of the social and economic mobility they seek. The emphasis on contingency is important in creating a multi-layered and dynamic account. Yet, it seems likely that this precariousness is – in part – a function of the structural position of those who have become drivers (usually young, unskilled, male migrants). There are certainly hints of the ways that ethnicity, age, class and gender, play into their experience of driving (such as when Hong covers his head from the sun). Without a consideration of how and whether this is the case, we might assume fragility to be universally and equally experienced by workers in Bangkok. Nonetheless, Fanon and Sopranzetti’s expositions of contingency stand in stark contrast to Lefebvre’s blanket critique of industrialisation. He offers a somewhat reductive view of economic modernization, which requires sacrificing ‘great and beautiful’ ways of life in favour of ‘ugliness, platitude and mediocrity’. Specifically, he laments the loss of ‘mandarins’ silks’ by women in China, as ‘the lowliest peasant girl to the highest Party chief, dresses up in blue overalls’ (2008: 44). Here is an undifferentiated and teleological view of historical change, and one that rests on the objectification of women’s bodies as a symbol of an uncontaminated past.

The interaction between gender and power is problematic throughout Lefebvre’s text. His silence over gender in his analysis of the separation of family and work in the Capitalist production of selfhood is surprising given the extensive gender scholarship that has shown this exact system to be grounded in a particular gender, race, and class configuration. Indeed, Elyachar’s exposition of ‘phatic labour’ in Cairo engages with this paradigm, which has tended to make women’s actions invisible. Lefebvre’s lack of attention to gender as a system of power is nowhere more evident than his analysis of sexual imagery in leisure, as a ‘break’ and a form of ‘escapism’, whose power resides in its ability to shock. This claim completely overlooks the systems of power (especially around gender and race), which are written in to the production, dissemination, and consumption of such images. By contrast, Fanon engages insightfully with the questions of power, gender, and bodies in his description of the erotic fantasies of Algerian women that revolve around possession and violence. In this way, he situates the veil in a relationship of power: ‘This women who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer…She does not yield herself’, and the European man reacts with aggression (1963: 44). There are nonetheless aspects of romanticization in his account of the Algerian woman: she is cast as the ultimate, dignified heroine, epitomised by ‘the refusal to go down on her knees’ (1963: p.67).

Returning finally to their configurations of space, there is a great deal of promise in the ways that these pieces foreground connections as constitutive of space. This is captured in Elyachar’s concept of phatic labour, which brings the communicative channels produced by sociality into view as objects of analysis in and of themselves. Networks therefore become more than an interlocking web of individuals, a framework of action, or a means of coordinating individual interests. This offers a distinct way of conceiving of space as a product, and one that shows the boundaries between representational space and lived practice to be fluid (and so challenging De Certeau’s opposition in *Walking in the City*). Elyachar therefore brings out the ways that communicative channels gain materiality through their commodification under the guise of microfinance. We can think of the sex work managed by Khadija in this way: communicative channels become tangible in the movement of human bodies through them, so that these networks are both discursive and embodied. This reading offers a distinct way of thinking through bodies in space, highlighting the movement of bodies as a constitutive aspect of spatio-temporality that is often overlooked. We can also think of the movement of motorcycle taxi drivers in this way: in moving their own bodies and the bodies of others through the streets of Bangkok, they actively constitute space. Soparanzetti demonstrates phatic labour by drivers to re-define urban life, establish which spaces are reachable or not, and restructure relations among city dwellers. This is an important addition the conceptualization of space itself, and a contribution that could be made even more explicit.