Response Week 3

Place making, claims Keith Basso, “is the universal tool of historical imagination”. A social process, the making of a place is very much dependent on the people experiencing the space.

The importance of the economic class of the person in the making of a place is perhaps best exemplified in Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s *The Railway Journeys*. It is interesting that while the people travelling on the second lesser class on a train could make the space available to them into a place which aided conversation, the upper classes travelling in the coach like compartment found the previously familiar environment of the coach which had been superimposed upon the compartment quite disconcerting. The parallel growth of the publishing industry alongside the railways could be credited to the inability of the upper classes to make the space of the compartment into a place they could feel comfortable in. Instead, they turned to the intellectual stimulations of silence and the printed word, occasionally allowing themselves to be befuddled by the increase in the impressions their perceptual apparatus had to process. Instead, they turned without, to the surrogate mental places envisioned through books. Their failure to make a place out of the space of the compartment made them think of themselves as mere parcels on a train, not belonging to the space they were occupying in the immediate sense, but belonging, perhaps, instead to their destinations. It is interesting that the train, while diminishing distances between destinations also eliminated, for some, the idea of place from the space of the locomotive itself. The train thus was refused the identity of a place and thus reduced to a mere limbo between places.

The Cibecue community of the Western Apache present the other extreme of the scale of recognition with place -they think that the people are of the place itself – they create a place out of a space which in turn creates its people. They identify their narratives of wisdom with these places and involve them, rather, depend on them, for the conversation of everyday life. They live their lives not in or alongside but through the places they create out of the space available to the community.

De Certeau’s idea of places as palimpsests thus hold true beyond the confines of urban space as each of us imposes multiple places within a space.

Bibliography

Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Place*, UNM Press, 1996

Michel de Certeau, Walking in the City, in The Practice of Everyday Life, University of California Press, 1984, pp. 91-110

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journeys*, University of California Press, 1986