Space Place Power, Week 4 Response

If the understanding of space is to have any “real world significance”(183 Sopranzetti), it must first be described in the realm of everyday life. The theoretical notion of how space can be understood is therefore shallow if it cannot be applied to any examples that describe what space means to people. This is where the crucial intertwining of theory and practice must occur in reconciling the political economic and phenomenological analyses. Indeed, the failure to attempt this renders the objectives of research irrelevant.

The non-static nature of how theory and practice and political-economic and phenomenological approaches interact is especially interesting in this respect. Space exists, whether in a physical or conceptual form, however it is when it is navigated that the theoretical approaches are enlivened. The multitudinous orientations of the world we live in are productive and conducive of differing political and economic phenomena. However, in this ever changing symbiosis it is illuminating to attempt to extricate the ways in which they interrelate and the flux-like nature of their co-constitution. Is thought producing action and vice versa, a continuous process, and how can we identify which one is constituting the other, in a real world situation. The architect Ole Scheeren’s argument is useful in this question in his attempt to move on from the “form follows function” manifesto postulated by modernist utilitarianism. He instead physicalizes Bernard Tschumi’s notion of “form follows fiction”, in his attempt to create buildings which imagine the different narrative pathways of people in spaces. Scheeren argues that the conceptual structure of capitalism is embodied in the organizational structure of hierarchical skyscrapers. Employees with the highest salaries occupy the highest offices, in a mode of “structural thinking”. Political relations, just as with the highly physically and conceptually mobile “entrepreneuralization” of the motorcycle taxis are embodied in the activities and navigations of their everyday life. Is attempting to separate and see which led to the other therefore a less enlightening endeavor?

Rather than a search for origins, I argue that a historicized attempt to consider the myriad ways through which concept and practice co-constitute is more revealing. Elyachar considers this co-constellation in the consideration of the economic routes are navigated and connected by urban mobility. Similarly, in Daniel Miller’s consideration of mass goods, he argues that they are representative of culture in the environments within which they operate and their role in the “process of objectification by which we create as an industrial society: our identities, our social affiliation, our lived everyday practices”(Miller, 1987, 215).

However, as Lefebvre states, the “everyday” nature of these practices and their reoccurrence does not contain them to repetition. They are not immobile navigations of space but are instead continually readjusting renegotiations both conceptually and practically. In this way the “phenomenological experience of the drivers and their perception of the city conformed and challenged their political-economic position while structuring their consciousness as human beings, migrant men, and political actors” (181 Sopranzetti). Similarly, Fanon states, “French colonialism has settled itself in the very centre of the Algerian individual” (65). The combinatory use of phenomenological and political economic approaches engrave the discipline of anthropology into real-world applicability. This encapsulates the “so what” justification for exploring the reality of how peoples lives are lived in differing environments. By doing so we can better understand and orient the fascinating complexities of these interactions.