

**The Emancipatory City? Paradoxes and Possibilities**, L. LEES (Ed), Sage, London (2004). 243 pp. UK £21.99 (pbk). ISBN 0 7619 7387 7.

Loretta Lees' edited book *The Emancipatory City? Paradoxes and Possibilities* contributes to an emerging research interest in the 'geography of gentrification'. Comprised of fifteen chapters by contemporary (urban) theorists, it explores the ways in which cities are connected to the wider political economic sphere through diverse processes, such as cultural differentiation, crime control, policy implementation and collective action, as well as the potential for urban transformation through carnivalesque behaviour, the counter-production of space, policy interventions, and social transgressions. Through an engagement with the philosophical ideas of Marx, Simmel, Benjamin, Foucault, Lefebvre and de Certeau, the contributing authors consider how gentrification may be understood as either a desirable (emancipatory) or objectionable (revanchist) aspect of economic and political processes interacting in contemporary urban space.

Chapter 1 introduces the discussion with a genealogy of utopian hopes for the city. Written by Lees, it poses a number of questions for readers to consider. These include: What understandings of freedom and justice are implied by the emancipatory city discourse? To what extent may such understandings be differentiated, for instance, in terms of freedom from and freedom to? What relationship exists between tolerance and emancipation? And, how may the acceptance of the self and the body as mutually constitutive of the city point towards the forms and places in and through which urban freedoms are realised?

Following this, part one of the book is entitled "Cities of (In)Difference". Comprising Chapters 2 to 5, it outlines the permeation of the long standing interest in difference as a feature of urban spaces by "highly naturalised geographies of indifference". These include the globalisation hypotheses of multicultural and globally interconnected socio-economies and postmodern understandings of urban spaces as networks of flows.

Opening this section, Susan Ruddick critiques the postmodern turn to the celebration of diversity with the suggestion that work in this field inhibits the conceptualisation of 'others' through its efforts to make excluded people intelligible, comprehensible and, in some cases, desirable. In Chapter 2, "Domesticating Monsters: Cartographies of Difference and the Emancipatory City", she argues for an oppositional exploration of the 'monstrous' as a means of comprehending what is other, without robbing it of its otherness through cultural or theoretical assimilation. Nicholas Fife further deconstructs tensions surrounding urban difference in Chapter 3. Focusing on surveillance and zero policing as a means of overcoming the culture of fear in cities, he suggests an ambiguity between the attempt to overcome the diversity encountered in urban communities, and the use of crime control measures to establish the public areas in cities as tolerant and emancipatory spaces.

In Chapter 4, Les Black and Michael Keith look at how the nature of government and urban space is changing in the context of moral concerns, particularly with regard to racial tension, community safety and the behaviour of young people. Through a case study of social policy initiatives in two areas of London, they deconstruct manner in which both the city and the communities which inhabit it are created as objects of new governmental regimes, as well as how the processes of institutionalisation are being transformed through local social practices.

This focus on communities is continued in Chapter 5. In "The Emancipatory Community? Place, Politics and Collective Action in Cities", James DeFilippis and Peter North unpack the term 'community' as an ideologically-loaded concept. They use a case study of community conflict

over the regeneration of the Elephant and Castle neighbourhood in London to explore the importance of place in social relations, and reveal the manner in which urban interactions influence political consciousness and collective action at the scale of the community. From this, they further point towards the processes through which difference and diversity are accommodated in shared interest groups and assess the influence of such groups in formal politics.

The second part of Lees' edited book falls under the heading: "Emancipatory Practices". Comprising Chapters 6 to 9, which focus on performative responses in or to the city (that may or may not be emancipatory practices), it details the politics of space in the city, the counter-productive processes of urban space, and interventions in the city that may be otherwise assumed as insignificant, intimate, mundane or eccentric.

Indicative of this latter point (particularly) is Gavin Brown's exploration of two fleeting urban spaces – the sites of public "(homo)sex" and the carnivalesque spaces created by the direct actions of the anti-capitalist *disorganisation* 'Reclaim the Streets'. Discussion of these spaces suggests that it is entirely possible for utopian processes of creative resistance to survive and coexist in the same spaces as more dystopic processes of capital accumulation and repression. On this basis, Brown's argues that it is time to move beyond an either/or view of the city as emancipatory/revanchist and begin to develop strategies that can offer ways out of this antinomy. Building on this, David Pinder (Chapter 7) calls for a dialectical understanding of the city as: fixed and fluid; freezing and flowing; static and alive. In "Inventing New Games: Unitary Urbanism and the Politics of Space", he details the modernist practices of Guy Debord and the Situationist International (SI) who sought to distance themselves from the city in the belief that it was a space of control and the concretisation of unequal and repressive social relations. By exploring the artistic and political acts of SI resistance, Pinder suggests the emancipatory possibilities of the city may be used to reinform the conceptualisation of urban spaces as political sites.

In Chapter 8, Gary Bridge looks at the act of walking in cities as a unique form of threading together diverse locations and situations, thus disrupting the geography of the city as dictated by the rational plan. Identifying a potential for pedestrians to impress their own story on certain parts of the city, he suggests the freedom to roam and the freedom to garner the rich experiences of urban life through walking as a primary means of urban emancipation.

The expressive, affective and perceptual powers of the body are further explored in Chapter 9, "Urban Escapades: Play in Melbourne's Public Spaces". As Quentin Stevens suggests, playful practices are performative experiments in which the joint actions of individuals are shaped by the dynamic contingencies of their spatial encounters. These are further able to actively define social potential as play makes possible the enactment of different ways of being in the world. With particular reference to playful practices in Melbourne's public realm, Stevens explores the processes of discovery, invention and transformation in play as concrete realisations of urban freedom.

In Part 3, "Utopic Trajectories", the relationship between spatiality and authoritarianism is deconstructed through a series of imaginative spaces or flows: territorial borders, the flow of water, the geographies of film and the ghost world. Jennifer Robinson (Chapter 10) explores the ways in which the spatiality of cities shapes their emancipatory role or, more narrowly, their potential for political transformation. By focusing on the transformative potential of persistent aspects of city life, such as borders, divisions, territories and the fixity of the built environment, she calls for a broader understanding of the emancipatory city with a consideration of spatial

stasis alongside transient urban flows. This standpoint is illustrated through a case study of South African cities as key sites in the political struggle against Apartheid.

Following this, Matthew Gandy (Chapter 11) uses water as a lens through which to view the complexities of urban politics, ranging from the evolution of different forms of city governance to the micro-political domains of home. In pointing towards the incorporation of the human body into the physical fabric of the modern city through the circulatory dynamics of water infrastructure, he shows how the imposition of hydrological order was both emancipatory, in terms of enabling access and sanitation, and politically ambivalent, in failing to undermine the foundation of the capitalist city. He updates his argument by stating that water remains a utopian trajectory in the developing world, not just for those threatened by thirst and disease, but also for activists involved in the contemporary 'brown agenda' of environmental justice.

In Chapter 12, "In Search of the Horizon: Utopia in *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix*" Geraldine Pratt and Rose Marie San Juan explore the role of urban space in films, through a double sense of real space (location) and reel space (connotation). In a case study of utopic urban space presented in two films, they suggest that emancipation is not spatially fixed, but rather a horizon of possibility – a non-place from which to reflect on alternatives. Steve Pile (Chapter 13) elaborates on these ideas through a consideration of the place of ghosts in the city. He explores the anti-capitalist protests in and around Parliament Square and Trafalgar Square on 1 May 2000, questioning whether the traditions of previous urban dwellers continue to 'haunt' the city of London.

The final two chapters of Lees' edited book are entitled "Reflections". Chapter 14 by Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift forwards a notion of emancipatory politics with a small 'p' – forever changing, always fragmentary. It suggests that the institutions of politics have gone national, with contemporary social movements snaking their way through an array of networked spaces and mobilising the city so that it is full of unexpected interactions. This has the effect of opening up all kinds of spatialities as resources for continuing political intervention. David Harvey (Chapter 15) extends this understanding of the emancipatory city through a broader discussion of social justice. In asserting that the right to the city is not merely a right of access to what already exists, but rather a right to change the city after our hearts desire, he further argues that utopian desires can never be wholly individual: they demand a collective effort. Harvey calls, therefore, for the (re)imagination of a more inclusive, even if continuously fractious city – an endeavour that is supported by the different axes of discussion in each of the essays in this collection.

As a PhD candidate conducting research in the city of Bristol, a large proportion of the literature I have surveyed has been focused on the materialities of the city as manifested in the political structures and practices associated with urban regeneration. This book offers a series of alternative understandings of urban space, through its critical exploration of urban imaginaries, experiences and representation processes. An accessible introduction to conceptual, empirical and theoretical issues involved in the developing geography of gentrification, it will be of particular relevance to researchers with an interest in cultural and narrative approaches to the constitution of the contemporary city.

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