These Clothes Don’t Fit!
Identity, Hybridity and Education in the City

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues the need for a transformational revaluing of the rights to the city through an unmaking of social fabric, since upcycling reframes existing power relations based on ownership of land and people and excludes the rights of children and the earth. It highlights the need for environmental education. Indicating that transition requires a paradigm shift, it employs a fractured, feminist bricolage. Operating from within a Western academic perspective it concludes that the work of remaking the city on the basis of social justice is a shifting process of encountering self and others in our own and other worlds.

Keywords: Alternative Education, Barefoot Approach, Bricolage, Citizenship, Danish Education, Ecology, Feminism, Postmodernism, Transformative Education

INTRODUCTION

In UK Higher Education today simultaneous changes are occurring across a wide range of disciplines. These changes are pervasive, inexorable and important. In real life, the values and drivers that underpin public and private organizations are under scrutiny. Across the world tensions have been growing between the reality of lived experience and state machinery under pressure from economic uncertainty. Individuals and organizations are positioning and aligning themselves at the grass roots and all of these shifts in position relate broadly to new perceptions of rights, ethics, and citizenship, social justice and a reclaiming of places and spaces within this changing world.

Located in the Paris student riots of 1968, Lefebvre’s text and call for Le droit à la ville (The right to the city) is a persistent and emotive image that has inspired and prefigures work on place, identity and social justice. Coming from the Latin villa, hence the English ‘village’, the word ville presents a collective space and rules within which people congregate and live. Lefebvre’s use of “la ville” now signifies a generic ownership of a recognizable modern urban space informed by his writings on daily lives, inhabitants and a wide body of philosophical encounters from Marx to Lenin and Hegel to existentialism. “La ville” in Lefebvre’s text refers to the centre of Paris and other cities as well as small towns, rather than suburbs and wider industrialised structures. Costes (2010)
examines the impact of Lefebvre’s modernity on national and international perceptions of the city arguing its contemporary relevance. Demonstrating the persistence of this call, Peter Marcuse’s blog (http://pmarcuse.wordpress.com/) evidences the way in which Lefebvre’s “cry and demand” for the right to the city became a reinvigorated debate in the context of an international Occupy movement. Following their eviction and a shift away from embodied protest making visible the ‘city’ and rights of habitation, the movement has been analysed from mainstream cultural perspectives for its lack of unified political strategy.

This paper begins by discussing ideologies embedded in the concept and construct of the ‘right to the city’, a political rationale for a methodology of making and unmaking meanings. Writing in 1966, Julia Kristeva describes Bakhtin’s reading of the logic of the poetic as coming “into being only in the margins of recognized culture” and the text as a “mosaic of equations…the absorption and transformation of another” (Moi, 1986, pp. 36-37). She uses the word “intertextual” as a descriptor for reading words as mediators and regulators between structuralist and culturally playful environments, thus disrupting inherent tensions of subjective and objective readings.

Informed by a feminist perspective of subjective positioning, this paper makes broad use of a Foucauldian tool known as governmentality, using the politics of the past as a means of considering historical power mechanisms as active curators, managing and networking the intersections of public and private space. Systems of exclusions in the concept of the ‘rights’ to the city reference long traditions of exclusions and ownership in the social engineering of Western cultural and philosophical structures on a global scale, perpetuating Western binary precepts ‘othering’ all strangers as ‘outsiders’, and colonising nature (cultural and physical) and the earth. Considering how identity functions in relation to private and public space, the paper uses short educational narratives as case studies from Denmark and Rajasthan to bring in other voices, other experiences, and enact other ways of thinking.

THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

Peter Marcuse’s (2009) discussion of critical urban theory outlines the impact and ideologies of Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’, and the continuing need for a different social and urban future to existing capitalist structures. Identifying with Lefebvre, a similar dissatisfaction with consumerism and profiteering clarifies a call to reform in the French journal A babord:

Devant cette ingénierie urbaine néolibérale, le concept du droit à la ville tel que l’a proposé en 1968 Henri Lefebvre, exprime ce droit, et non un simple privilège, de tout «citoyen urbain» de prendre part à la ville telle qu’elle existe, mais aussi à sa production et à sa transformation. Le droit de participer à son aménagement, le droit politique de définir la ville, le droit à un environnement sain et aussi, plus simplement encore, le droit à un logement adéquat ou à des transports collectifs accessibles. (Gauthier, Joanette and Latendresse, 2008)

In the face of this neo-liberal engineering, the concept of the right to the city proposed by Henri Lefebvre in 1968, emphasises that it is the ‘right’, not just a privilege, of every “urban citizen” to participate in the city, in the form in which it exists now and also in how it is produced and transformed. The right to participate in its conversion, the political right to define the city, the right to a healthy environment and also, simply the right to adequate housing and accessible public transport”. (own translation)

Since Lefebvre, the need for growth and profit has led to segregated communities, the evacuation of state responsibilities and a population disenfranchised through an urban malaise, a form of disassociation that extends far beyond the city. For Marcuse (2009, p. 189) the right to the city is “both an immediately understandable
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