Spaces of urbanity revisited : from the boulevard to the mobile phone network.

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1. THE AFFORDANCES OF THE CITY

There are two ways of looking at space: as a particular extent, which may be measured and counted; or as a place where certain activities can – or should – take place. The pioneer of the latter view was no doubt E.T. Hall (1959), who applied this perspective to one's own body in interaction with other bodies. As he famously put it, intimate space is where you fight or make love. Manar Hammad (1989) extended this view to buildings, notably in his study of Le Corbusier's monastery *La Tourette*. He was interested in the way public spaces, such as occasional lodgings, were instantly transformed into privately structured spaces by their occupants, and how more or less enduring, but tacitly accepted, habits convert the refectory into a hierarchically ordered set of seats. Private space, in this sense, is where you put up obstacles to keep others out.

This perspective focusing on activities taking place in a space is particularly suitable when analysing wide-ranging and multifunctional spaces such as the city, or extended stretches thereof as a neighbourhood or a street, as I have argued elsewhere (Sonesson 2003). The analysis can also be made in terms of spatial types: the pedestrian street, the village square, the harbour front, etc. It could be argued that Hammad's aforementioned analysis is basically about the spatial type of the conference centre, rather than specifically about *La Tourette*. Someone who definitely was concerned with this kind of characterization of typical kinds of spaces was the classical sociologist Georg Simmel (1957), who attempted to characterise the specific traits of the bridge, the door, and the window.

There subsists an ambiguity, however, in the definition of space in terms of the activities that habitually take place there, or could take place there. The question is whether a particular space forces a certain kind of behaviour upon us. My understanding is that activities are not determined by spaces, although there may be an element of determination. To some extent, spaces are created in order to contain

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certain kinds of activities. But the ensuing determinism of the space can be subverted, as we know well, after more than a century of decembrism, situationism, sit-ins and other artistic and/or political activities. In fact, most spaces are not as heavily determining as is often suggested. Rater, spaces are customarily associated with certain activities. Indeed, it may be better to understand this in the sense in which James Gibson (1979) says that certain objects offer specific "affordances": some are graspable, others edible, etc. As Gibson also observes, affordances result form an interaction between the object and a particular (group of) subject(s). The boulevard, for instance, affords strolling, but only to people who know how to use a boulevard, and not to rats or people who have lived their whole life in the countryside. The boulevard is certainly a cultural object, and it is true that to Gibson affordances are properties only of natural objects or, perhaps more exactly, they are natural properties pertaining sometimes also to cultural objects. Nonetheless, as I have argued elsewhere (Sonesson 2009), many affordances are only culturally available; that is even true of one of Gibson's own examples, the mailbox. As a natural property, the opening in the mailbox may offer the possibility of putting something into the box, or of pouring something (some liquid, for instance) out of it. But we immediately know it is not for pouring anything out; it is for putting in letters and nothing else. Thus, the cultural affordance is not easily separable from the natural one[1].

1 The concept of affordance was inspired by the ideas of the Gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka, and seems to be analogous to those of another Gestalt psychologist, Kurt Lewin, who talked of similar things in terms of vectors. A vector is a direction, and perhaps all affordances may be understood in that way.

2. URBANITY AS COMMUNICATION

Although trains and cars move, change of position in space is not a requisite of communication, in the sense that a meaning is communicated from one person to another, contrary to what is suggested by the mathematical theory of communication still current in semiotics. Nor is recoding a requirement (Fig.1). Indeed, the train and the car do not have much new to tell us, nor does the Lévi-Straussean woman circulating between the tribes. The two senses of communication may overlap in some cases (when a letter is transported by train, for instance), but basically they are quite different. As for recoding, it is sometimes needed, but most of the time, the same (or at least overlapping repertories of) signs may be used at both ends of the communication chain. Simply put, what happens in communication, in the relevant sense, is that some subject creates an artefact, and another subject is faced with the task of furnishing an interpretation for this artefact (cf. Sonesson 1999). Of course, when the message is sent as a letter, the train or the airplane has to assist it on its way to the receiver. Sometimes the sender has to go to the same particular

place to create the artefact. The telegraph, still current at the end of the 20th century, required such a displacement. By contrast, e-mail communication does not require more displacement on the part of either the sender or receiver than sitting down in front of a computer or, more recently, firing up a smart phone. Sometimes the receiver has to go somewhere else to pick up the message. This is still the case if you want to experience original prehistorical cave paintings or Renaissance frescoes. In other words, sometimes the sender and/or the receiver have to move, in addition to or instead of the artefact. Displacement is thus quite a separate issue from communication.

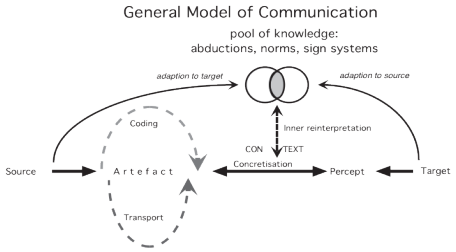

Fig. 1. Communication as something offered for interpretation

Although displacement is not a requirement for receiving messages – even less so nowadays when you can send an email instead a telegram or peruse archives on the Internet without going to the actual place where the archives are located – displacement still has the advantage of offering ever new potentialities of messages. Transport may be the occasion for communication. Indeed, movement has always offered new vistas, even to the predecessors of *Homo sapiens* and other animals. Precisely because movement may be a concomitant of specific kinds of communication, spatial displacement and communication have to be distinguished to begin with. Given this distinction, urbanity may be understood as an augmented density of potential messages that are made available with each change of position.

Another peculiar case, which emerges once we construe communication as a task offered for interpretation, is that the sender may him/herself be (part of) the message (cf. Sonesson 1999) The artefact created is, in this sense, his/her own body (Fig.2) or parts thereof that are singled out for attention. This applies to all gesture, to all kinds of spectacles, to everyday meetings and indeed to the classical situation of communication. In the latter case, the sender may be saying something or showing a picture, but his/her own body is

also part of the message[2].

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Sonesson 2000), the *spectacular function* can be described as an operation resulting in a division applied to a group of people, and separating those which are subjects and objects, respectively, of the process of contemplation; but, in fact, the subjects and objects of contemplation are often the same, at least temporarily. In the market, on the square, or along the boulevard, observation is (potentially) mutual, as well as intermittent. Yet, this is not true of the official parade or the dismemberment of Damien, nor of the sporting event or the theatre. In ritual, there is a difference between those who only observe and those who, in addition to observing, are also observed. In contrast, along the boulevard, but also already on the town square, the spectacular function is symmetric and continuously changing. However, contrary to what happens in other parts of everyday life, it is certainly dominant, in the sense of the Prague school; it not only retains the upper hand, but it also uses everything else for its purpose.

2 It should be noted that awareness and/or purpose have not been included in the characterization of communication given above. Messages of the sender's body are of course often not intended.

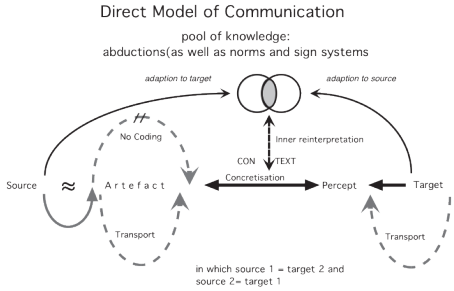

Fig. 2. The peculiar case of the sender being his/her own message

3. TWO CASES OF URBANITY

It was said above that the essence of urbanity might well be the augmented density of potential messages made available with each change of position. In this sense, change of position does not only stand for whole body movements, but may also involve a change of gaze. Thus, there is much more to flanerie than meets the eyes of Baudelaire and Benjamin.

3.1. The Boulevard experience.

We shall consider the boulevard in the following as the precursor to the pedestrian street, which is now common in most parts of the world, and ignore what might have been specific to the first

boulevards constructed by Haussmann, as well as the imitations in Saint Petersburg.

My first discussion of the boulevard as a semiotic device came right out of my own experience of living in Paris in the 1970s(Sonesson 2003). I am not the only one to have been fascinated by the boulevard as an epitome of urbanity and, hence, of modernity. Before Baudelaire, Poe wrote about the view from the café table. Gogol pondered the infinite possibilities of Nevskij Prospect, and Dostoevsky surveyed life in Saint Petersburg during the white nights. Nor did the boulevard experience cease to fascinate numerous writers and artists who came after Baudelaire. Several films by Eric Rohmer, from "L'amour l'après-midi" to "Les nuits de la pleine lune" (1972 and 1984, respectively) are basically about life on the boulevards. This is also largely the case of Robert Bresson's "Quatre nuits d'un reveur" (1971; based on "White nights" by Dostoevsky, but moving the scene to Paris). Thus, literature and film confirm my intuitions about the importance of the boulevard to urbanity.

The boulevard is a public place, as is, of course, the town square. Spatially, however, the boulevard is a place of passage, while the square is a meeting place. This could be taken quite literally, as we shall see: on the boulevard, itineraries run in parallel (at least partly), but on the square they tend to cross. Another implication of the same observation, however, is that the square is basically static, whereas the boulevard stands for dynamism: the continuous thrust forward.

In order to discuss the boulevard as a semiotic device, we have to start by establishing spatial semiotics firmly on the ground. This can be done by having recourse to "time geography," a very abstract discipline invented by the Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand. Time geography is concerned with general rather than special facts, that is, with invariants, which tend to be trivial, rather than exceptional in kind. The invariants are conceived as limits of, or restrictions on, the liberty of action open to individuals or groups, stating what is possible and impossible in given situations. These restrictions are defined in terms of space and time, but do not take their origin in natural or economical laws; rather, they result from the fact that phenomena tend to crowd or affect each other, without having any other kind of relation explicable from general rules.

Both space and time are finite; therefore, they are considered to be scarce resources. Space-time is inhabited by individuals, each one characterised by his/her own trajectory, starting at the point of birth and ending at the point of death (Hägerstrand 1970). Indeed,

each point in the geographic now is best understood as a bundle of processes, that is, "in terms of its double face of graveyard and cradle of creation" (Hägerstrand 1983).

3.2. Structure of the boulevard

First of all, the boulevard is a place on *which individuals whose lifelines start out and finish at very different places permit them to run in parallel for a shorter or longer duration*. This is really the central topic of Gogol's short story "Nevskij Prospect": the soldier and the painter, who come from different social classes, and who live in different parts of the city, walk together for a moment along the boulevard. So much for the different points of departure. However, they part again, when each one discovers a woman on the boulevard whom he decides to follow, which brings them both away from the boulevard and to new parts of the city where they have never been before. In Poe's short story, "The Man in the Crowd," such a lifeline starts out abruptly from the café window, and ends in the void 24 hours later.

Implicit in this description is a second property of the boulevard, which we hinted at in the beginning: its capacity for giving access to the whole of the city, for being the stage upon which all the rest forms the behind-stage (in a Goffmanesque sense). The soldier and the painter both leave the boulevard to go to other parts of the city, but the itineraries that they choose are only two out of many potential ones. In this sense, the boulevard is the starting point for numerous virtual trajectories. This explains the sentiment, always expressed in the fiction of infinite possibilities being available along the boulevard.

Another particularity of the boulevard is that it puts emphasis on one of the fundamental laws of time geography: that two persons cannot occupy the same space at the same time. When you find yourself on the sidewalk, in particular on one as crowded as that along the modern boulevard, it is essential to steer free of other people. As Ervin Goffman (1971) observes, it takes a lot of largely unconscious manoeuvring to avoid bumping into other persons. Each encounter on the sidewalk involves a negotiation about who is to step out of the way or, more ordinarily, the degree to which each of the participants is to modify his/her trajectory. However unconscious, such a transaction supposes a basic act of categorisation; we may negotiate with somebody whom we have recognised as a fellow human being, but not with a lamppost, a statue, or even a dog. Indeed, when this process of interpretation

becomes conscious, and the other is not simply seen as a stranger, but as an individual person, or even as a person of a particular class or social group, negotiations may break down. This is exactly what happens to Dostoevsky's underground man at the start of the story: neither the hero, nor his opponent wants to give way.

Nevertheless, the boulevard, as it may still be experienced today in Paris and in many other (particularly Latin) big cities, is not a polyphony of voices, but a tangle of gazes. Indeed, the primary function of interpretation, telling us that another person is approaching for whom we must give way (as noted by Goffman), is overdetermined by a secondary function of interpretation, normally at a higher level of awareness, which is aesthetic, as least in the traditional sense of involving "pure contemplation." As such, it does not only pick up information, but also gives it out by conveying messages such as "I observe you" and "I find it worthwhile to observe you." The hero of Eric Rohmer's film "L'amour l'après-midi," who spends his life on the boulevard, expresses this double function of the gaze very clearly when he says life on the boulevard is basically a question of "trying oneself out on another." The gaze, in this case, as in those of Baudelaire and Gogol, is exchanged between men and women. Frenchmen still unabashedly conceive this as a mutual interchange between the sexes. For Americans, on the other hand, this is something men do to women and, consequently, they talk about "visual rape." The metaphor is adequate, at least in the sense that it describes the crossing of the visual barrier. In fact, the trajectories of the boulevard are peculiar in that they do not only allow for movement, but create virtual access to looking, and no doubt also to smelling, touching and, more rarely, speaking. At least this is what Rohmer's hero hopes for.

Considered as a semiotical theory, time geography is too limited. It does give us a temporal and spatial substratum on which to build, but we also have to account for the relative permeability of trajectories, and for the qualitative differences of the territories that they traverse. This is why we now turn to spatial semiotics.

3.3. The theory of borders, vectors, and transgressions

The German sociologist George Simmel (1957) makes a comparison between the bridge, the door and the window. One can cross the bridge indifferently in two directions, he says; in the case of the door, it is very different to enter and to leave. The window is used to connect an interior space and an exterior space, exactly as the door is; but,

whereas the door opens in two directions, the window has, according to Simmel's expression, a "teleological effect" (we might say a vector today), which goes from the interior to the outside, but not in reverse. In the prolongation of this reasoning, it might be suggested that the door and the window, like the bridge, are devices apt to restore continuity, which are applied to another device, the wall, the function of which is to transform the continuity into a discontinuity. The result, however, is not zero, but a qualification of the initial statement.

All that has been said so far remains describable by a topology, that is, a purely static theory. However, Simmel distinguishes three additional things that do not concern the mutual relationships of spaces, but the provisions that these spaces permit us to carry out: movement in only one direction, in the case of the window; movement in two directions, but with different significations, in the case of the door; and movement of an identical type in the two directions, in the case of the bridge. The privileged direction of the course and the qualification of space as being interior and outside are thus added.

The two station-points between which the bridge extends are undifferentiated, like the two stops of a bus. In the case of the door and the window, it is obvious that the stations qualify the course. Obviously, between qualitatively different spaces, the direction cannot ever be indifferent. But it may fail to be manifested or be manifested in only one direction. The reverse of the ordinary window must be the shop window: the latter has a privileged access from the outside inwards.

Permeability is relative to the different senses, as well as to movement. There is some confusion when Simmel opposes the window, which may be penetrated from the inside out, to the door and the bridge, which may be penetrated in both directions. The problem is not so much that there are windows, such as shop windows, which are more customarily permeable from the outside in, or even that apartment windows may be permeable from the outside. The basic issue is rather that, while windows are permeable to sight, doors and bridges are permeable to movement. There is a difference in the practice of the users: one leaves by the door and one looks through the window. As spatial devices, the road, the bridge, the door and the window do not require urbanity. But just like the boulevard, these devices depend on permeability in different directions and in different modes. Permeability in this sense, however, can only be understood in relation to the border.

In order to demonstrate the semiotic nature of borders, Hammad

(1989: 39ff; 2002: 59ff) picks the wall as an example. It is possible to jump over a wall, he observes, but this may be perceived as an aggression. A wall may appear to be insurmountable, but it is only so to someone having no resources at his disposal, such as a ladder for climbing over it or a crowbar to crack an opening in it. The wall is merely as "dissuasive device," that is, an invitation not to pass it over. In addition, it can be seen as an invitation to search for a door, that is, a place where the wall may be traversed.

Indeed, the door as well as the wall is a device that serves to filter certain thing out, while letting others through. This is illustrated by the exterior wall panels of the cells in Le Corbusier's *La Tourette*. They are divided into four sub-panels: a door, which lets through people, light, air, mosquitoes, warmth and cold; a metal lattice serving as a mosquito net, which lets through air and cold, but neither people nor mosquitoes; a window pane which lets light pass through but neither air nor other objects; and the concrete basement which lets through neither heat, nor light, nor air, nor people. Hammad concludes that all barriers are selected in that they let through certain categories of agents and not others. They are thus defined, not by intrinsic properties, but by the part they play in some particular social practice (a "program" in Greimasian terminology). Yet, the material properties of these spatial objects are not indifferent: a piece of winter clothing must be woven tightly in order to prevent the passage through the fabric of cold winds, and a door must be sufficiently wide to permit the passage of a man carrying burdens.

Permeability, it turns out, is relative, not only to the different senses and to movement, but also to different kinds of agents. Interestingly, however, Hammad does not attend to the possible unidirectionality of borders, which we observed in our analyses of Simmel's window and door (cf. Hammad 1989: 75; 2002:100). Indeed, the window certainly has the capacity to let light and looks through in both direction, but there is a sense, noted by Simmel, in which it is permeable to gazes from the outside in, and not the reverse. The first kind of "being able" is somehow physically incorporated into the object; the other one is just a part of the social practice of which the window forms a part. By using dark glasses or one-way mirrors, it is possible to incorporate the second prescription into the object, but that is not usually done. This only serves to show that, basically, a border is always a semiotic device, although in some cases the prohibitions and permissions that it involves may take material shape. The implication is not that the border is arbitrary, created by mere fiat, but rather there is always

some social practice in which it is grounded.
Even this may be described in terms of time geography, if, adding semiotic qualifications, we admit that, on their way, the individuals coming together have passed through different qualitative spaces, traversing unscathed various barriers which normally filter out those being of particular kinds of origin, class, and so on. In this case, contrary to Hägerstand's (1983) words, their consciousness does not "feed on what has happened" nor "work on what is going to happen."
The boulevard, as we have encountered it above, answers to some extent to the same formula. However, to begin with, it is not a point where all the trajectories meet, but an on-going set of trajectories. As a result, the extension for which the trajectories come together is less enduring, and the memory of earlier parts of the life-lines, as well as the anticipation of future parts, does not have to be emptied out.

3.4. The coffee house experience

What is special about the boulevard, in relation to the coffee house, is the degree of freedom that it allows. But it is still not the first version of a public sphere based on exchange. Before it, we have the square, not in the sense of the market place, but as the central place of the village, not the *zócalo*, but the alameda or *parque*, to use the Latin-American terms. There is a Mexican folk song, the refrain of which consists of telling a girl to go once again around "el parque" in a circle in the hope that this time she will meet someone who will marry her. I have never seen anything like that in Mexico, but not long ago you could still experience something of the kind in the small villages on the Greek islands; every evening, all the inhabitants, including new-born children, assembled on the central square (which, on the islands, is often the harbour front), walking up and down over and over again. The trajectories, which are here strictly parallel, although having opposite directions, are always the same. They do not open up to other potential trajectories away from the square; they certainly permit an exchange of gazes and also often of speech. Indeed, this is what generates the "leakage" between trajectories known as gossip (though perhaps not so much on the square). But all this follows a well-known, repetitive pattern.
Theoreticians of modernity, at least those who have connected it to the city, have insisted more on another spatial configuration, the coffee house. Public man, the person taking part in a discussion about the means and ends of the state and other aspects of public life, and

beyond that about all essential intellectual preoccupations, first came to his own in the English coffee houses, and then flourished in the French cafés before and during the revolution (cf. Habermas 1962; Sennett 1977). Jürgen Habermas is certainly not usually considered to be a semiotician, but his early theory of a "public sphere," which went from being merely "representative" (of court authority) during the Middle Ages, to involving the reasoned, critical, interchange of rational opinion from the Age of Reason onward, is undoubtedly of the same general type as Lotman's semiotics of culture, according to which different historical epochs are dominated by different sign types.

Habermas' modernity antedates that of Baudelaire, but it is considerably more recent than that of Bakhtin, and its locus is the coffee house, originating in England and France during the 17th and 18th century. In this "bourgeois" public sphere, rational discussion becomes possible because persons coming from different social groups and classes, as well as from all parts of the country, can meet on equal footing without their individual history or personality holding any importance. To the extent that emotions are not taken to be expressions of something else, for instance a personality, they do not have to be disciplined and rendered passive. This was, in Sennett's (1977) view, what rendered possible the rich public life of the 18th century. In opposition to Riesman, Sennett claims that, instead of the masses having become more and more alone in a society which is itself more abstract, social conditions have instead become increasingly sentimentalised, rendering impossible public life, as it took place in the coffee houses during the Age of Reason.

One of the pioneers of social psychology, Gabriel Tarde (1910), already noted the importance for public life the kind of conversation that has no fixed purpose, which often took place at the Parisian cafés. Later on, the cafés played a similar role all through Europe in the emergence of the different Modernist movements and, at least in France, they have continued to this very day to have a very important place in intellectual life, giving rise to Structuralism (and thus to semiotics), as well as Poststructuralism and Postmodernism. If, in recent times, there has been a decline of public life, that is, in the view of the sociologist Johan Asplund (1983), due to the diminishing time resources available in industrial society and to the consequent lack of spaces after the cafés were closed down. This is to forget that, in Paris, the cafés have still not closed. And, of course, there is also still more left of public life in France, as evidenced, among other things, by the importance

of cafés for the development of French semiotics (for instance, the Greimas School).

In Sweden, as no doubt in many other places, however, coffee drinking never acquired this public character: it essentially takes place in the private homes of friends and acquaintances; it is associated with gossip rather than with serious discussion; and, traditionally, it is mainly considered to be a practice characteristic of women. I first made his observation as a simple generalisation from the present state of Swedish society, but later discovered that Swedish ethnologists (notably Valeri 1991) have demonstrated the historical correctness of this surmise. Even traditional cafés in Sweden fail to manifest the public character they have in many other countries: they do not open up onto the streets, but are found behind the counter where pastries may be bought for home consumption. Curiously, it is in the age of the Internet that public cafés, turning their front to the street, have finally emerged also in Sweden.

Whatever the difference between the coffee houses of the Age of Reason, the cafés of the artistic bohemia, the Café de Cluny of the Greimasian seminars in the seventies, and the Espresso houses of our contemporary youth, they are all specimens of a different spatial, or semiotic, device than the typical Swedish "conditori." The former is similar to the boulevard, and perhaps to the market place, in bringing together individuals from different social and professional spheres, permitting an interchange in which earlier trajectories and details of life history are irrelevant. In relation to the coffee house, the boulevard permits a less sustained exchange of signs; it involves many more individuals coming together for much shorter durations, and the exchange is rarely verbal, but more often visual and perhaps tactile: gazes and touch rather than words. However, it should be noted that the street café, which has begun to proliferate in recent decades, actually opens up to the street and constitutes something of an auditorium in relation to which the street is a scene. It is thus essentially a part of the boulevard experience.

Whatever the origin of the commensals, the vector of the coffee house, in the sense of the Age of Reason, is turned inwards, and it is in between those coming together in the coffee house, that exchanges take place. In that respect, it is similar to the Swedish "conditori." After all, in the coffee houses, there may not have been so much intellectual discussion as the writings of the Age of Reason let us think. Perhaps there was mainly gossip – or conversation, as Tarde would have it. The typical Parisian café, however, has two semiotic

vectors: the inner room is inward directed, i.e. conversation, whether on the level of gossip or not, is mainly geared to those assembled in the room; the vector of the terrace, however, is predominantly focused on the street. The exchanges, of whatever nature, will thus rarely be verbal, but mostly conveyed by gaze, as in the boulevard. Of course, the terrace will always allow for the inward movement, which is manifested verbally for the most part. It is this later model that is being increasingly implemented by the *latte* generation.
From the point of view of urbanism, there is a paradox here: we would tend to expect that globalization and the new social uses of the Internet would lead to an emptying out of classical public space. At least from one point of view, the proliferation of street cafés, the opposite seems to be happening.

4. PRIVATISATION AND PUBLICATION

In French, the term privatization is ambiguous: it means to render something private, but also to deprive somebody of something (In English, too, the root is clearly the same). In Hammad's work, that which is rendered private is at the same time robbed from the public. When the visitor at *La Tourette* installs himself in the cell, he immediately begins to transform this public space into a space of his own. More formally, privatisation involves, according to Hammad's definition, a person being able to conjoin himself with a place, while others are unable to do so, and a superior instance authorising such admittance to the place. One is reminded of Rousseau's ontology of private property, according to which space was once common to all until the first person set up a border and declared that what was within the border was his property (in which case the same person take on the part of subject conjoined and authoriser). Or, as Hammad (1989: 45; 2002: 66) puts it, "privatisation has something to do with the very general problem involving the control of processes and the mastery of space."
Since bacteria can hardly have any notion of private property and mammals, in particular human beings, certainly have, both Rousseau and Hammad must be right in some way. On the other hand, public space, as conceived by Habermas and best described by Sennett, is much more than an "amorphous mass" from which private space is spread out. Sennett's characterisation of the coffee house as a place where persons coming from different social groups and classes, as well as from all parts of the country, can meet on an equal footing without their individual history or personality having any importance could serve to describe the public sphere in general. Even as a

description of the coffee house, a more formal definition would have to go beyond the simple conjoining of a person, or several persons, with a space and take into the account the earlier trajectories of these persons starting out at different points in a qualitatively differentiated space and ending likewise. It would also have to take into account the permeability resulting between the different trajectories at the central space of encounter, where this permeability pertains to the different senses, and to the production of incentives for the senses of the others, including gesture and speech.

If we admit that there is a process of privatisation creating the private domain, then perhaps we should also postulate a process of "publication," which is not simply the reversal of the former one. Something does not become public simply by returning to the innocence of undivided space before the fall occasioned by privacy. The transgression of the borders erected by privatisation is also a positive fact. Indeed, there may be a dialectic spiral taking us from privatisation to publication and back again and, if we conceive privatization to be a process, as Hammad clearly does, there is no reason to think that there cannot be a converse process of publication. In fact, it is not even necessary to think that publication must follow privatization. Rather, there may have been intermittent processes of privatization and publication at different moments of human history.

5. GLOBALIZATION IS COMING TO TOWN

Globalization is of course mainly a commercial concept: it means that big enterprises have given up their already frail attachment to the nation state and are determined to make as much money as possible, whatever the consequences may be for the country that bred them and the people living in it. But globalization has consequences on many other levels (cf. Sonesson 2002, 2004). Here, however, we will only discuss those that have implications for the boulevard experience, and we will only pick two examples.

One of the consequences of globalization is that populations are transferred from one part of the globe to another in proportions that have rarely been known before. From Gogol's perspective, the intermingling of different worlds, which took place along the boulevard, had its entries and exits in different neighbourhoods of the city, which were different mainly as to class. Although Paris has long been an international city, the case may not have been very different in Baudelaire's time. My own experience of the Parisian boulevards in the seventies, however, involved people coming from many different nations being present, first on the boulevards, but also to an increasing

extent in more direct face-to-face interactions, which in many cases took place at the university. Twenty years later, in my own town in Sweden, this commingling of nationalities was already a part of everyday life.

At some point, however, there was a fundamental change. For a long time, everybody seemed to be playing by Western rules, not of rationality, certainly, but concerning the public character of public space. If the boulevard, rechristened the pedestrian street, is a space where we are all offered up to the gaze of the others, Muslim women wearing one kind of veil or another, from *hijab* to *burqa*, constitute a challenge to all of modern urbanity. In any form, the veil is an obstacle to seeing and, in particular, being seen. The problem, I believe, is fundamentally semiotic. The argument of the Dutch government that a (male) terrorist may hide arms under a *niqab* or a *burqa* is essentially a confabulation. The real reason we tend to feel so strongly about this, however, is that this kind of clothing destroys the *symmetrical permeability to gazes* that is the foundation of urbanism.

Globalization attacks the boulevard experience from a quite another angle, too. Thanks to the mobile phone, we are connected to the whole world, potentially all the time. In that perspective, the boulevard experience may seem trivial. Nonetheless, the boulevard experience has two advantages: it addresses all the senses, and it puts us into contact with people we do not know (although the latter function may in a way be more perfectly accomplished by chats on the internet). A few decades ago, the only ones who were talking in the street without having any visible partner were people with schizophrenia or similar maladies. Nowadays, of course, most of those talking on the street are absorbed in an interchange taking place along some digital highway or other. They have a vector directed inwards, from the point of view of the physical space in which they are situated, although much it may be directed outwards in relation to digital space. Now doubt these people still observe the Goffmanean manoeuvre permitting them not to talk with other people in the street; but while they are living in digital space, they must be closed off to the multisensory experience of the boulevard.

I cannot resolve these problems, which are problems of our contemporary world. There are some paradoxes, which I have described, and I hope to be able to make sense of them at some later stage. For the time being, however, I will have to be content with diagnosing the situation.

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