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The City Unbound: Qualitative Approaches to the City

Jane M. Jacobs

Introduction

It is from the security of an age of positivist hegemony in urban studies that one can designate as a specific field of review 'qualitative approaches to the city' and hope that it means little more than an update on the latest urban ethnographies (itself a mammoth charge if one does not presume a Western limit). To speak of 'qualitative approaches' evokes a methodologically diverse terrain, tenuously drawn together by a reliance upon the hermeneutic interpretative process. There are the more familiar, although often marginalised, methods associated with ethnography (such as the in-depth interview and participant observation). But increasingly qualitative research includes discursive and representational analyses, a methodological shift which responds in part to post-structuralist and feminist thinking.

The last decade has brought significant changes. The city itself is a qualitatively different place. Shifts in social theory and a burgeoning of academic interest in the city have also worked to expand the range of disciplines and perspectives scrutinising the urban setting. The city as an object of analysis has been unbound. Long the concern of a range of interconnected disciplines within the social sciences (e.g. geography and urban planning), the city is now open to the distinctive approaches of those working within interdisciplinary fields such as cultural and feminist studies. Most notably, the 'culture' of the city has come under new scrutiny. It is arguable whether this sudden interest in what

might generally be defined as the cultural dimension of the city is responding to a material shift in cities, or if it is simply the city being seen anew. Within this newly open context, a review of qualitative approaches to the city is timely, but can in no way be definitive. At best, it can seek to cut a meaningful and indicative path through the theoretical and empirical developments which have led to the growing reliance on qualitative methods in studies of the city.

The review begins by briefly outlining the lineage of qualitative approaches in urban studies. The various developments which have led to a revitalisation and diversification of qualitative approaches to the city and to a transcending of traditional confines of qualitative work are then considered. Some indicative themes within this revitalised and transformed terrain are explored in more detail. Studies drawing on representational (semiotic and discursive) methods are reviewed, with specific attention to work on residential and retail consumption processes. The review then examines a range of qualitative work emerging from feminist analyses of the city, and studies of sexuality and the city. Following the theme of marginal urban groups, the review examines new material on 'race' and social 'disorder'. Finally, the review examines two spatial extremes of recent urban work: the re-emergence of micro-scale street studies and the growth in bold, eclectic, city commentaries. The review ends with a consideration of the implications of the

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general trends in qualitative methods in urban studies.

Qualitative Approaches to the City

Within urban studies, approaches relying on qualitative methods have had an uncertain and generally marginal status. This is well illustrated by the transformation that the early Chicago studies have undergone as they have entered the historiography of urban studies; more often evoked as originating points for positivist areal studies and factorial ecology, than as exemplary urban ethnographies. Qualitative approaches to understanding the urban have long been overshadowed by the hegemony of positivism within mainstream urban studies. Positivist critiques of qualitative approaches attacked their particularity, the supposed over-identification with the subject, and the apparent partiality. Thus defined, qualitative approaches were limited to explorations of so-called urban 'ways of life', although the status of these ways of life as specifically or causatively urban has long been rightly questioned (Gans, 1962; Hannerz, 1980; Jackson, 1985). Only recently have urbanists begun to reassess the contribution made by the Chicago School and foreground the important contributions that may be made using a specifically qualitative approach within urban studies (Hannerz, 1980; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Jackson, 1985).

Qualitative approaches to urban settings, then, have never disappeared—although the suitability and appropriateness of such methods have been confined to specific urban settings. One such confinement was wrought through seeing qualitative (and specifically ethnographic) urban studies as more appropriate in the context of the Third World city than the Western city (e.g. Cohen, 1974). Non-Western cities have received some of the most extensive and sustained ethnographic attention. In every sense, this is a product of the tendency, to anthropologise the exotic 'other'. Non-Western cities, conceived as a hybrid of modern and pre-modern forms, were deemed appropriate for ethnographic evaluation. Non-Western urban studies will not form a central part of this review, but it is a tradition with an on-going vitality which could offer much methodological inspiration for those focused on the Western city.

Qualitative studies of Western cities have in the past operated within specific empirical confines consistent with the tendency for the qualitative to be linked to the interrogation of the exotic 'other' (Hannerz, 1980, p. 3). Fox (1973, p. 20, cited in Hannerz, 1980, p. 2) described anthropology's shift to the home urban setting as an "undignified scramble to find substitute savages in slums". Qualitative studies produced through this phase of urban research sought out the ghetto or the poor, the deviant, the ethnic or racial sub-group (for overview, see Jackson, 1985; Atkinson, 1990). From the minutiae of the everyday practices of this disparate collection of 'exotica', ethnographers attempted to accrue evidence of the dysfunctional and alienating modern city or, in a more positive vein, the persistence of community within the city. Such studies have been troubled by an unclear relationship with grander theorisations of urbanism and urbanisation. Jackson (1985, p. 171) argues, in the case of urban ethnographies, that while there is an abundance of examples most are merely "*in* the city, rather than *of* the city". Ethnographic studies were commonly prescribed the role of rendering more real the exotic and marginalised, but were seen to have little value in terms of the modernist project of theory-building. Within political economy approaches there was considerable scepticism about the values of such work. Castells and Harvey have both attacked culturalism, as evident in urban ethnographic work (Jackson, 1989, pp. 29–30). Castells (1977, p. 75) talked of "the myth of urban culture", while Harvey (1973, pp. 84–85) at one time viewed culture simply as a morphological concept rather than as a constitutive force in the city.

The Qualitative City Unbound

The broad range of approaches which could be grouped under the rubric of the qualitative

are still seen by many as simply 'quaint' descriptive techniques (Burawoy *et al.*, 1991, p. 3). The last decade has wrought fundamental changes to both the city and the way it is understood, centring qualitative approaches in urban commentary and analysis as never before. First, the relationship between general theory and the specific case-study has been transformed (see Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981). Secondly, the repertoire of qualitative methods has expanded through an increased recognition of symbolic and representational realms (figurative and discursive) and the role they play in the constitution and mediation of social and material processes.

A number of developments in contemporary social theory have unsettled the once subordinate status of qualitative approaches to the city. The first of these changes can be detected within the traditional confines of ethnographic studies of marginal groups in the city. According to Marcus (1986, p. 166), the 1970s saw a "practice-focused" attack on positivist theory. In response, emerged a number of radical experimental ethnographies which sought a bottom-up reformulation of key theoretical concerns within political economy accounts of the city. The exemplary ethnography within this vein is Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour* in which the author uses the ethnographic method to explore how 'labour' (the working class) is constituted through the everyday cultural experiences of boys in the school setting. *Learning to Labour* remains an important example of the way in which studies of the particular can engage with and extend theory, in this case the political economy account of class formation and reproduction. The empirical explication of this link between everyday practices and the 'grand' processes of class formation within capitalist society opened the way for a tradition of radicalised urban ethnography with a clearer relevance to broader political economy accounts of the city.

The British cultural studies tradition contributed much to the radicalisation of qualitative approaches to the city (see Jack-son, 1985, 1989). Rarely were these studies specifically concerned with the nature of urbanism or urbanisation, but they frequently dealt with people and processes within the urban scene. Following a project of valorising popular culture and political struggle, the cultural studies tradition has produced important qualitative studies on rituals of resistance and popular culture (e.g. Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979, 1988), as well as race and urban social movements (e.g. Gilroy, 1987). The work generated through the cultural studies tradition has been significant in its innovative melding of traditional ethnographic techniques and an attention to the discursive and representational constitution of social categories. Invigorated and revised by a range of developments within social and literary theory, cultural studies is now experiencing "an unprecedented international boom" (Nelson *et al.*, 1992, p. 1) and it is from this field that much of the theoretical inspiration for new understandings of the city is drawn.

Critiques emerging in traditional ethnography-based disciplines of sociology and anthropology have played an important role in repositioning the ethnographic project by placing under critical scrutiny the procedures by which the social has been represented. The critique is concerned with both poetics and politics. The ethnographic text is no longer seen as a mere report on a social reality. Rather it is a 'partial truth', a text with specific literary and rhetorical features from which its authority as a reconstruction of society is derived (see Spivak, 1988; belle hooks, 1990; for anthropology, Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988; for sociology, Atkinson, 1990; Game, 1991; and for geography, Jackson, 1991; Keith, 1991; Pile, 1991; Rogers, 1991). Critical scrutiny of the poetics of the ethnographic text has elucidated the often hidden politics of the ethnographic project itself, its invasive and distorting potentials. Ethnography is not above the power relations of society, it enacts them. The sociological and anthropological gaze has been turned away

from the exotic 'other', to an interrogation of the texts through which the 'other' has been represented, even 'invented'. This critique has led to a number of closures yet it has also opened out a new empirical terrain in which "reading, writing and text can contribute to social and cultural analysis" (Game, 1991, p. 3).

The boundary between social reality and representations of that reality has collapsed. The notion of an extra-discursive or pre-discursive social reality has been replaced by a semiotic understanding of society in which culture or the social is written and figured. The revised empirical project for sociology, anthropology and related disciplines draws heavily on French social and literary theory and feminist theory in which the social constructions of identity are a focal concern. Feminist theory, in particular, has provided some of the more significant elaborations of the relationship between the gendered subject and discursive and representational workings of patriarchy (see for recent considerations of this theme, Irigaray, 1985; Pateman and Grosz, 1986; Butler, 1990). In doing so, feminist theorisation of the gendered subject has been critical in conflating the sociological project and the textual deconstruction project, although materialist and positivist perspectives remain important within the feminist investigation of patriarchy.

Parallel theoretical developments which have sought to dissolve old structure/agency dichotomies have also contributed to a re-centring of qualitative approaches. Gidden's (1976, 1984) structuration and Bhaskar's (1986, 1989) realist philosophies have both influenced a number of the disciplines traditionally concerned with urban questions (see also Sayer, 1984, 1989). Realist perspectives, for example, advocate combined intensive/ extensive methodology to highlight the link between broader structures and processes in local settings. The attention to the complexities of the specific suggests a commitment to a range of qualitative procedures (see Cloke et al., 1991, for a useful summary).

Thus far, I have outlined theoretical or methodological shifts towards a cultural and representational focus which have laid the ground for a resurgence of qualitative approaches centred around signification and local specificity in contemporary urban studies. I have implied that the shift is theory-driven and does not respond to an identifiable shift in the ways cities are. Recent considerations of the post-modern city or the city as a product of late-capitalism suggest that dismissing cultural processes is no longer tenable. Jameson (1984) argues that late capitalism has a distinctive cultural logic which is reshaping the form and functioning of the city. This cultural dimension of post-modernity has been central to a number of recent urban studies, although there are variations in the degree to which commentators privilege the cultural in their explanations of contemporary urban processes. Harvey's (1989) political economy account of the condition of post-modernity sets the 'turn' to the cultural as determined by the disruptive force of flexible accumulation under conditions of time–space compression. Lash and Urry (1987), and more recently Lash (1990), stress post-modernity as a cultural movement in a more mutually constitutive relationship with the specific socio-economic conditions of late capitalism. Zukin (1988a, p. 432) notes that the new city requires economically determinist analyses to give way to a "more open materialist analysis that embraces culture and politics as well as economic structures", while Cooke (1990) argues that the modernist era of centralised theorisation of the city must adjust to location-specific explanations. Regardless of whether the cities of late capitalism are 'new', they certainly beckon new approaches. Urban ethnography has now been superseded by an explosion of studies which analyse the city using an expanded set of qualitative and interpretative methods.

Representational Cities

The conceptualisation of the landscape or representations of it as 'texts' which can be 'read' reflects more general trends within

social theory and in particular the turn to discursive and representational realms as a source of understanding, apparent in a broad group of approaches encompassing a reconstituted semiotics (see Krampen, 1979) and iconography (see Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988). Within these approaches the built environment and representations of the environment are seen as a means of communication. Messages are encoded in the environment or in representations of the environment and the task of the semiotician is to decode or to read the messages locked therein (see Dear, 1986; Greimas, 1986, 1990; Duncan and Duncan, 1988; Kenny, 1992; Barnes and Duncan, 1992, for accounts of this method in a spatial context). This is often referred to as a method of deconstruction (Dear, 1986, 1988; Duncan and Duncan, 1988; and more critically Marden, 1992) although most of the studies emerging from this field, I would argue, are using a historico-semiotic approach, rather than a deconstruction approach in Derrida's original sense.

An important theme has been the relationship between ideology, power and the built form. These studies may be loosely grouped together as exploring the social production of the city. Although they are methodologically diverse—including historical reconstruction, semiotic reading and discourse analysis—they all echo the project mapped out in Lefebvre's (1991(1974)) influential work on the built and spatial form of the city as socially-produced sites of meaning and power.

Much of the early semiotic work on meaning, power and the urban form suffers from too literal an application of linguistic analysis to the built environment and is often highly codified and mechanistic (Knox, 1982). The source of understanding is assumed to be in the material objects produced rather than in the ideology and practices of which they are a product (e.g. Relph, 1987). At worst, semiotic studies can become vehicles for individualistic, although often entertaining, pronouncements on the meaning of the built environment. Barely

grounded outside the author's own perceptions, such readings may search for origins and essences which belie the fluidity of meaning and power associated with the urban built form.

Increasingly, studies within semiology are moving away from privileging the built environment as the source of meaning and turning to an approach which takes account of social, political and material contexts, such as Gottdiener and Lagopoulos's (1986) call for a socio-semiology. A socio-semiology incorporates an attention to ethnography and history. As Ledrut (1986a, p. 119) notes, "if there is an urban semiology, it is dependent upon an urban anthropology". This 'socio-semiotic' approach acknowledges that meanings associated with the built environment are not innate, but rather are authored by certain social groups and interests. Choay (1986, p. 173) notes that it is now necessary to replace the idea of a "language *of* the city" with an understanding of the "language *on* the city". Knox (1982, p. 294) argues that it is important not simply to know that the urban environment is meaningful but to know who is communicating through the environment, to what audience and to what purposes. The urban built environment can be seen as part of a discursive realm or, as Duncan and Duncan (1988) put it, a "textual community".

Agnew *et al.*'s (1984) significant contribution to a cultural approach to the city contains a number of essays which explore this relationship between ideology and urban form. The editors see culture as a "realized signifying system" embedded in everyday practice and imbued with both ideological and material effects. The essays collected within this volume provide empirical examples of this agenda in a number of urban settings and periods: the Russian city (Bater, 1984), the *apartheid* city (Western, 1984), the Chinese city (Murphey, 1984) and postcolonial Madras (Lewandowski, 1984). The general emphasis in these essays is urban morphology as a reflection or embodiment of political ideology and economic imperative.

Ley's (1987) study of ideology and the

built environment of Vancouver attempts to present a more complicated depiction of the link between ideology and built form. In its pursuit of post-modern difference, Ley examines how two planning ideologies (one "rationalist", one "expressive") are manifest in distinct parts of Vancouver. The two cases are intended to provide a spatial "synchronicity" which testifies to the diversity (if not the contested complexity) of the landscape manifestations of planning ideologies. Sorkin's (1992) collected essays explore the obfuscation of social orders by the playful built forms of the contemporary city, which he likens to a theme park. Two of the essays (Soja, 1992; Winner, 1992) provide relevant deliberations on the technological city.

Many studies within this vein confine their attention to the ideologies of 'experts' directly involved in producing the built environment: planners, architects and 'social visionaries' (Foote, 1985; Choay, 1986; Ledrut, 1986b; Kenny, 1992). A few studies attempt to move beyond the idea of the urban form as an uncontested product of the expert or the professional. Domosh (1989a) extends the methodology applicable to the urban landscape through an historical application of Geertz's (1973) "thick description" using the example of the New York World Building. Her reading of the 19th-century skyscraper as an expression of the ideology of commerce and modernity, combines a sensitivity to the social and economic context. Working with both the macro- and micro-scale, her methodology attends to the functional (land values), the symbolic (processes of legitimacy) and the social relations (of both individual and class interests) which give rise to the skyscraper. This single case exposé of method has been applied more generally by Domosh to urban landscape of modernity (1988, 1989b, 1992). Dovey (1992) provides a comparable analysis of contemporary skyscrapers. Using promotional material generated by corporate developers, he reads the contemporary skyscraper as a symbol of the "creative destruction" of post-modernity. Dear ·(1986) has given attention to the

discourses and rhetorical modes of planners in the context of tensions between modernists and post-modernist planning practices and, more recently (1989), in terms of privatisation. Similarly, Rydin and Myerson (1989) have provided an insightful and methodologically-explicit rhetorical analysis of the political discourses associated with green-belt planning (including argument, tropes and narratives). Cuthbert's (1987, 1991) analysis of the imprint of colonialist planning ideology on the urban landscape of Hong Kong stresses the complex "micro-powers" of planning practice through which planning ideology must pass before becoming manifest in the urban landscape. Cuff (1989) presents a similar picture of practical complexity in relation to planning and it is perhaps no coincidence that both Cuthbert and Cuff write as planners/architects and may well be familiar with the complex practical links between state ideology and everyday practice.

Knox (1984, 1987) goes beyond the domain of expert discourses and practices and conceives of 'unpacking' meanings associated with the built environment, not only in terms of authors/designers/developers but also readers/viewers/users. Bagguley et al. (1990) also examine "consumers" of planning ideology in their study of community responses to the Lancaster Local Plan. They argue that planning struggles are not just about competing architectural aesthetics but also about struggles by differing interests to realise "projects" of race, class and gender (Bagguley et al., 1990, p. 151). Jacobs' (1992) analysis of an urban redevelopment controversy in East London demonstrates that planning controversies are discursive battles in which certain interests, reliant upon or loyal to specific discourses, have differing political leverage within a discursive field predisposed to arguments of architectural aesthetic.

In the majority of this work there is an acknowledgement that meaning and power, while symbolically present in the built form, cannot be simply read from the form itself. Knox notes that making the link between the

existing built form and the processes of its social production is inherently problematic for "the great bulk of the urban fabric symbolizes the impotence of the majority of its inhabitants" (Knox, 1982, p. 293). To confine studies of culture and the urban to mere 'readings' of the existing built environment ignores those less powerful visions which did not win out and get built. Morris (1990) describes the methodological dilemma facing urban semioticians who seek to describe the urban text at a time when change is so prevalent that it is likely the form being described will have disappeared before the reading goes to press. She argues that the semiotician should be reading not the objects themselves but the processes of change which lead to this ephemerality.

Textual approaches to the city may become lost "amid a virtual infinity of meanings" (Jackson, 1988a, p. 264) or be "seduced" (Zukin, 1988a) by "poetics". The challenge is to maintain a grasp of the politics of production, reproduction and consumption while being alert to the poetics of discursive formations. While there is much rhetoric about the need to bring together cultural and material concerns in the analysis of meaning and the environment, there are few examples of applied research where this has successfully been achieved. Combining an understanding of the intersection between cultural values with a detailed analysis of economic and political forces has been a persistently difficult empirical project.

Cities of Consumption

The recent work on gentrification and the role of taste and consumption practices in the revalorisation of urban areas has provided a rich body of material on the intersection of cultural processes and the workings of capital. It is an area of urban studies which highlights the necessity for the opening out of urban analysis to the full range of qualitative methods. Zukin's (1986, 1988a, 1988b) study of the transformation of loft space in New York's Soho concentrates primarily upon the real estate market, but does so with a keen eye for how culture, expressed through the art market and historical preservation, intersects and becomes a critical ingredient in economic and political processes that have transformed New York's loft space into 'valorised' space. Jager's (1986) analysis of gentrification in an Australian city, also highlights the role of heritage nostalgia in marking out a particular pattern of consumption (see also more generally Wright, 1985; Hewison, 1987; Urry, 1990). The link between gentrification and heritage has been well explored by others. Wright's (1985) 'walk' through Stoke Newington with a former 'local' exposes the contradictions of academic nostalgia for the displaced working class. Jacobs' (1992) study of urban transformation in East London demonstrates the strategic linking of conservationist and developer objectives and the tensions this produces with residual imagined communities. At another scale of urban transformation, Burgess (1982), and Burgess and Wood (1988) investigate the role of place advertising in small-firm decisions to locate in areas such as London's Docklands (see also Short, 1989; Crilley, 1990). Watson (1991) has similarly explored the link between place promotion and regional city decline under industrial restructuring.

Beauregard's (1986) appraisal of explanations of the gentrification process also highlights the need to incorporate an understanding of the cultural mediation of this form of urban transformation. His attention to 'taste', imagery, familial practices and different discourses of gentrification (from those of the promoters to those of the analyst) highlights the significant and multi-dimensional way in which culture intersects with capital in this urban renewal. This is a complexity well documented by Mills (1988) in her study of the various interest groups involved in gentrification in the case of Vancouver. Neil Smith (1986, 1992) has revised and extended his explanation of gentrification around a more complex theorising of culture and capital which ar-

gues that the gentrification process is worked through a vocabulary of frontier mythology. Bondi (1991, 1992), building on a feminist critique of gentrification (Rose, 1984), has argued that the gentrified landscape carries significations of traditional patriarchal gender relations which contradict the more complex gender formations in the gentrification process.

The link between 'disorganised' capital and consumption processes in the contemporary city (see Campbell, 1987; Featherstone, 1991) has also been explored in the context of retail spaces, and particularly shopping malls (see Clarke, 1991, for a useful contextual essay). Retail consumption is now understood as an intrinsic part of everyday urban practice and provides the means by which social difference is both inscribed and transgressed (Bourdieu, 1986; McCracken, 1988). It is not just the commodities bought which differentiate; ironically, the very act of being in the homogeneous, socially-sanitised and globally-familiar shopping mall (Gottdiener, 1986) has given rise to specific mall identities (Jacobs, 1984; Kowinski, 1985; Williamson, 1986; Tomlinson, 1990).

The turn to the past and to local specificity in post-modern design and commodification processes has meant that the surface appearance of shopping malls is increasingly differentiated (Sack, 1988; Goss, 1992). Equipped with a full range of life-style attractions (from ice rinks to high art) the aestheticised shopping experience is home for the conspicuous consumption practices of the middle classes. Crawford (1992), using a semiotic approach, argues that these sites of hyper-consumption have transcended their shopping-centre origins and are now present in a range of urban localities, from museums to offices. Ley's (1988) and Ley and Olds's (1992) readings of the world's fairs suggests that we may well have entered an age of 'heroic consumption'.

Sheilds (1989), in his study of shopping malls in Canada, extends a semiotic approach. He accepts that the language 'on' and 'of' these environments is significant. He argues that it is also necessary to attend to the activities and practices associated with the use and consumption of these environments, the 'social spatialising' associated with the shopping mall. Sheilds' attention to the theatre of the use of the mall is but one way practice may be incorporated into studies which are alert to, but do not wish to over-privilege, the representational as a source of understanding.

Feminist Cities

There is some debate as to whether a feminist perspective necessarily alters the methodological project, predisposing it to a more qualitative approach. Nevertheless, in pursuit of this question, feminism has produced a number of very useful volumes on the processes of feminist research (see Stanley and Wise, 1983; Ward and Grant, 1985; Yeatman, 1986; Harding, 1987; Smith, D., 1987; Stanley, 1990). One of the propositions placed in the early elaboration of a feminist methodology was a distinction between masculinist quantitative methods and feminist qualitative ones. Stanley and Wise (1983) argued that ethno-methodology and phenomenological approaches offered useful tools for a feminist project which sought to break down the barriers between the researcher and the researched (see also Andrew and Moore Milroy, 1988). In later evaluations of this position, Stanley and Wise (1990) retreat somewhat from their dogmatic advocacy of qualitative methods as the only appropriate feminist approach. McDowell (1988), drawing on both feminist and realist positions, also calls for more diverse methodological approaches. Certainly feminism has actively interrogated existing methodologies and brought to the fore a range of alternative approaches which foreground personal experience and research politics.

The empirical work emanating from a feminist understanding of the city is as diverse as feminism itself. There has been much general theorisation on the gender division of urban space (for overviews, see Harman, 1983; McDowell, 1983) as well as

some notable empirical editions on women in cities (see Andrew and Moore Milroy, 1988; Little *et al.*, 1988). A number of the essays in these case-study volumes demonstrate the usefulness of qualitative methods in entering and understanding the complex workings of patriarchy both in the household and in sites of production—that is, the production/reproduction dynamic. For example, Michelson's (1985) account of the daily routines of women in paid employment adapts Hägerstrand's time geography, as developed by Alan Pred, to a small-scale time-budget approach. The time-geography approach has been regularly applied in feminist research directed at demonstrating the fragmented nature of the lives of women in dual paid work/caring roles (e.g. Cichocki, 1980; Pickup, 1984, 1988; Hanson and Johnston, 1985; Michelson, 1985; Tivers, 1985, 1988; Droogleever and Karsten, 1989). Westwood's (1984) study compares the differing home/work relationships of Asian and Anglo-British women in Leicester through an exploration of daily routines.

It is far from surprising that Australian cities, distinguished by their suburban sprawl, have generated a number of innovative studies of suburban life. Game and Pringle (1979) and Watson (1988) have examined the gender relations of suburban life using traditional statistical methods in conjunction with women's testimonies. Richards's (1990) study of gender relations and suburban ideology and practice is based on in-depth interviewing and applies a specially designed computer package (based on grounded theory interpretative method) for the coding and analysis of interview transcripts. Modjeska (1989) presents an innovative collection of fragmented and personalised women's views of city life from that of the professional planner to the immigrant homeworker.

There is a range of new work generated by a feminist-informed research agenda which re-writes the relationship between urban public spaces and gendered identities. Burgess, Limb and Harrison (1988a, 1988b, 1988c) apply a group analysis approach in their exploration of women's and men's environmental values and urban open space. The work is exemplary in making explicit its innovative method of in-depth group interviewing. Offering a different perspective on urban open space, Valentine (1989, 1992) has used the in-depth interview to map out a geography of women's fear in the city—the way in which fear of crime inhibits their use of public space—providing the basis for an inventory of feared spaces. Valentine (1989, p. 385) argues that the confinement of women in urban public space is a "spatial expression of patriarchy". Pain (1991) develops the geography of women's fear in a structuralist manner, linking levels of women's fear with a range of spatialised socio-economic factors which influence women's sense of control in different urban localities. Feminist perspectives on the city have broadened our understanding of the link between urban spaces, social identities and social practices. Grosz's (1992, p. 251) preliminary exploration of transformations in the body–city relationship arising from geographical space being usurped by the "pure surface" of the screen monitor suggests a fruitful theme of the body–space relationship which could be developed within urban contexts.

A feminist perspective, applying both representational and practice-orientated qualitative approaches, has also broadened our understanding of consumption activities in the city. The relationships between social constructions of femininity, domestic labour and consumption has become a central concern within feminist research. Early perspectives tended to over-emphasise the oppressive implications of consumer practices for women. Bowlby (1988), for example, explores the impact of retail hypermarkets on the food-shopping practices of women. A number of recent studies have focused explicitly on the shopping experience and suggest that the relationship between consumption and gendered power relations is more complex and multi-dimensional. Consumption practices are not simply oppressive for women, but offer both plea-

sure, the exercise of desire and even the possibility for resistance to oppressive relations marked out in other spheres (Nava, 1991). Prus and Dawson (1991) provide a good empirically-based account of shopping practices and their ambiguous role as both labour and pleasure. McCracken's (1988) treatment of the relationship between culture, symbolic meaning and the consumption activities, provides a useful study which combines both a semiotic approach and an attention to the practices which adhere to the symbolic terrain. Winchester (1992), again using a semiotic approach, reads the shopping mall as a site which engages with female consumers in a contradictory manner: as both 'housewives' and 'fashion-plates'. Women are presented with an 'illusion' of control and independence within a setting which is multiply inscribed with a 'hidden' patriarchy. Meaghan Morris (1988) places her more subtle cultural studies gaze on the shopping centre and uses the idea of the pedestrian to enter a critical point of analysis which evades an emphasis on spectacle and reaches towards an understanding of the shifting relationship between the feminised shopper and masculinist rhetorics of space and commerce. McRobbie (1991) suggests that the analysis of consumption needs to desist from an over-emphasis on pleasure and begin to reinstate the material and social imperatives of shopping as work. Feminist understandings of the consumption process show how qualitative approaches need to inter-link everyday practices of shopping with readings of the representational spheres of consumption.

Drawing on an eclectic array of sources, Elizabeth Wilson (1991) provides a stimulating, feminist commentary on life in the unfixable urban labyrinth. Wilson is a contemporary *flaneur*, a city stroller, who brings forth the horror and the beauty of urban life in some of the world's greatest cities. Wilson's urban consciousness is alert to the contradictory impulses of the city; the spectacle of disorder; the oppression of planning. Under her gaze, fear and desire are contingent, and the city becomes known through its

social and cultural margins of gender and sexuality. Wilson's commentaries are not simply about women, but about the ways in which gender/sexual identities and relations are inscribed in urban forms and practices— from the urban vision of the children's character Babar the Elephant, to the housing crisis in Latin American cities. Not all readers may agree with Wilson's assumptions about what constitutes the masculine and feminine of the city and urban life, but all readers will recognise that this collection takes feminist understandings of the city into exciting new terrain.

Sexuality and Cities

Weightman (1981) noted that the activities of lesbians and gays in cities were frequently overlooked by geographers yet clearly had spatial expression. Gays have received the most attention in the recent geographical turn to the issue of sexuality and urban space (e.g. Castells, 1983; Jackson, 1989). Lauria and Knopp (1985) have demonstrated the link between 'urban renaissance', a general process of urban revitalisation, and gay identity assertion. Their analysis combines an attention to the traditional political economy understandings of gentrification with a case-study approach attentive to the institutional arrangement and social practices of gay communities (see also Knopp, 1990). Knopp (1987) extends his analysis to the consideration of gay and lesbian social movements as a political force in the urban setting. Bell (1991), in overviewing the state of gay and lesbian geographies, notes the need for research in this area to engage more fully with qualitative methods of ethnography and oral history. Wotherspoon's (1991) detailed historical-ethnographic account of the emergence of 'gay Sydney' provides an exemplary study which consciously revalorises many of the urban spaces once negatively linked to marginalised and criminalised gay practices.

The absence or late appearance of an equivalent body of work on lesbians and the

city is noteworthy. There is debate as to whether this absence reflects a different lesbian urban spatiality or simply a lag in research. Castells (1983, p. 140) controversially argues that lesbians are 'placeless' and have more radical political goals which escape spatiality. Those studies to examine urban lesbian communities do suggest that while there may be social and political coherence within urban lesbian sub-groups, this is not necessarily expressed spatially (Wolf, 1980; Lockard, 1985; Winchester and White, 1988). Alder and Brenner's (1992) interview and action-based study of an urban lesbian community suggests that lesbians had created a residential and commercial concentration in the city but that it had a "quasi-underground character", suggesting that lesbian spatial practices are subsumed within patriarchal structures (both violent and economic) which inhibit spatialised visibility. The controversy surrounding apparently distinct spatiality of lesbian communities in the city suggests an important area for new research.

Marginalised Cities

Traditional themes of crime and disorder, race and ethnicity remain central within qualitative-based urban studies. The racial segregation and dysfunctional area anlyses have given way to more reflexive approaches shaped by the focus on social construction. Smith continues to incorporate qualitative methods with more conventional methods in her on-going attention to the emergence of a socially-segregated city (e.g. Smith, S., 1989). Jackson's (1987c) edited volume on race and racism provides a number of studies on the workings of race as a socially-constructed category in the urban setting. For example, Phillips (1987) examines anti-racist rhetoric in housing policy and Jackson (1987b) explores racist constructions in academic and political discourses about Puerto Rico in the US. Chance's (1987) contribution on the Irish in London is a useful study, departing from a discursive-based social-construction method and applying in-depth

interviewing and activity analysis to explore ethnic territoriality. Western continues to contribute actively to the literature on race, both in the South African setting (1984) and more recently (1992), in a more reflexive fashion, in his study of Barbadian Londoners' reflections on 'home'. Smith's update on the *apartheid* city includes a number of case-studies which draw in part on qualitative methods and provide useful insights into a setting edging painfully towards post-colonialism (Smith, D., 1992). Sarre (1987) provides a useful and methodologically-explicit reflection on realism in practice using the example of the distribution of ethnic housing in Belfast. Anderson's (1987, 1988, 1990, 1992) investigations of the social construction of racialised places, using the example of Chinatowns in various cities, have provided important examples of how historical accounts can inform understandings of contemporary processes of planning and commodification in the city.

Social constructionism has also impacted on studies of crime, social disorder and dysfunction. Essentialist perspectives on the 'dysfunctional' sub-group have been replaced by studies attending to the role of institutional and media constructions of criminality (see Hall *et al.*, 1978). Susan Smith, for example, explores the link between criminality and popular and institutionalised racial stereotypes (Smith, S., 1986, 1988). Burgess (1985) examines the way the media link civil disobedience to a negatively-depicted 'inner city'. Keith (1987, 1988) uses a spatial semiology to outline the links between police/black street clashes and the emergence of popularly defined 'no-go areas'. Fyfe (1991) draws our attention to the geography of policing. Jackson (1988b) uses an ethnographic approach to a neighbourhood under change and argues that definitions of 'social disorder' often contradict internal definitions of local order and overlook local realities of deprivation. Holden (1988) provides a useful overview of the contribution of street ethnographers to understanding the daily lives of New York's crack addicts.

Privatisation of state services, policies of deinstitutionalisation and the emergence of a permanent under-class of unemployed have generated new categories of the socially marginalised. The urban homeless are a visibly dispossessed minority whose marginal status in the contemporary city has rightly received much attention (e.g. Bingham *et al.*, 1987; Dear and Wolch, 1987; Ropers, 1988; Winchester and White, 1988). Not all of the work on the urban homeless can be defined as qualitative in approach. Much of the available material is policy-oriented such as that generated through the Los Angeles Homelessness Project. Dear and Gleeson (1991) use a combined interpretative/quantitative analysis of the press to assess community attitudes toward the homeless in Los Angeles. Taking an historical perspective, Veness (1992) argues that definitions of homelessness are constructed around cultural ideals of home-ownership. Koegel (1988) has brought an ethnographic approach to urban homelessness and demonstrates the value of retaining an ethnographic perspective in understanding the everyday lives of the homeless and their relations with the state. Ruddick (1990) has adapted de Certeau's (1984) model of everyday streetlife to a consideration of Los Angeles homelessness.

Although far from marginal in a social sense, middle- and upper-class groupings have been strangely absent from the analysis of urban social groupings. The work on gentrification as a middle-class process has remedied this to an extent (see earlier). The élites of society are now also coming under scrutiny. In the case of residential landscapes, Duncan and Duncan (1984) and Duncan (1992) have shown the self-conscious re-invention of Anglo aesthetic in the suburb formation of élite neighbourhoods. A number of studies have turned to upper-class sites of 'production'. Lisle-Williams (1984a, 1984b) and Cassis (1985) both explore the ways in which City of London financial practices have remained linked to a specific, kin-defined social élite. Although from a less clearly qualitative perspective, the peopling of urban capitalism is also taken up by Thrift

(1987). Not only are dominant class groups within society coming under reflexive scrutiny, but there is an emergent body of study from black social commentators on 'whites' (e.g. hooks, 1989, 1990).

Within a broader tendency to approach race, class, ethnicity and gender as socially-constructed categories it is almost refreshing to encounter a contemporary ethnography of urban social groups which returns to less reflexive procedures such as participant observation. Burawoy *et al.* (1991) present a collection of essays which grew out of a graduate seminar in participant observation of everyday life in the modern metropolis. Despite its modest beginnings, it provides a useful and rare exploration of the participant-observation method in a range of metropolitan settings (from the workplace to the community) and in relation to a range of social processes (from the social movement to immigration).

City Streets

Recent social theory has generated new responses to old urban spaces. The street is one such urban space to be given renewed attention, as Berman's (1982) redemptive reading of Jane Jacobs' 'dance of the street' attests. Some of the studies of the street apply the discursive/semiotic mode outlined earlier. For example, Boddy (1992) uses a semiotic approach to explore the network of tiled tunnels and glassed skywalks which are the new streets of the contemporary city.

Street studies have the potential to direct attention to the spatial and temporal ontology of individuals in a specific setting as opposed to semiotic and discursive readings. Cues for such an approach to the street have been provided by Debord's (1983) idea of the society as spectacle, Goffman's (see Hannerz, 1980) conceptual metaphor of society as a dramaturgical stage, and Lefebvre's (1991) and de Certeau's (1984) deliberations on practice and everyday life. For example, de Certeau's (1984) essay on "Walking in the city" takes walking as a form of enunciation,

a self-empowering, communicative act which evades the dogmatism of planning and other forms of urban authority.

Jackson (1988b) explores the street as a site of resistance through ritual, using the example of the Notting Hill Carnival, London. His study is not only concerned with the practice of the carnival but with the way in which media representations of this event emphasise black criminality and thereby obfuscate the positive political force of such an event. Elijah Anderson (1990) is also concerned with race relations at the street level and explores the ways in which 'street etiquette and wisdom' are part of the everyday negotiation of racial and class differences in a mixed-race urban area.

Jukes (1990) asserts that the street is a site where it is possible to move away from the traditional areal view of the city, "the silent panorama", and take instead the "involved, complicit point of view of its pedestrians". The street views he produces of modern urban life in London, Paris, Leningrad and New York are an innovative tandem 'narrative': one Jukes's own thoughts, the other a montage of quotations and images. The montage text self-consciously reproduces the complex, multivariate and fragmentary experience of the street, enabling the reader to see the street as a shifting, multiply-inscribed spectacle of people and politics. Murray's (1991) innovative feminist/post-modernist reading of the streetworker in the Indonesian city highlights the body/space relationship of street-trading activities.

Hybrid Cities

The review to date has demonstrated that there is a tendency within contemporary urban studies to combine once discrete methods. It is perhaps symptomatic of this tendency that there is a growing body of urban commentaries which are methodological hybrids: historical and contemporaneous, materialist and semiotic, qualitative and quantitative. Thse methodologically non-specific urban essays often trace lucid and

eclectic paths across spatial and social forms of cities past and present. Schorske's (1961) study of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna has inspired an on-going tradition of similar urban commentaries. Menes Kahn (1987), acknowledging a debt to Schorske, uses the eclectic commentary to rewrite modern cities as centres of tolerance rather than sites of alienation. Richard Sennett's explorations of cities have traced inspirational themes beginning with the shifting relationship between the private and public realms (1974) and more recently the link between the built forms of the city and social practices (1990). While Sassen (1991) and King (1990) both identify a new city species, the global city, which is understood not only in political economy terms but also in terms of its lifestyle, its architectural language and its 'cultural forms'.

Los Angeles has been a star performer in these cinematic city studies. Mike Davis's (1991) hard-edged account of Los Angeles depicts a city of cavernous socio-economic disparity, private profiteering and surveillance. Soja's (1989) self-consciously post-modern (actually modernist) account of Los Angeles presents yet another hybrid study in which the city 'comes together' (is constructed) using a traditional political-economy approach and is 'taken apart' (deconstructed) using an eclectic semiotics. It is a hybrid method of traditional political-economy 'analysis' and tail-end 'deconstruction' which is taken up by Ward (1990) and applied to Mexico City.

Holston (1989) has taken the anthropologist's eye to the manifestations of *avant-garde* modernism in the setting of that paradigmatic modernist city, Brasilia. He produces a 'critical ethnography of modernism'. This study stands as a testament to the methodological conflation which has occurred in recent years. His specifically-anthropological gaze produces an 'ethnographic' text composed of planning history, semiotic readings, as well as socio-economic and socio-spatial analyses of income groups. It looks very much like the text a reconstructed (or should I say decon-

structed) geographer, sociologist or other urbanist may have produced.

Conclusion

General texts on qualitative methods abound and disciplines previously under the influence of positivism are now formalising qualitative methodologies (see Burgess, R., 1984; Jackson, 1985; Eyles, 1988b; Eyles and Smith, 1988). There are now useful texts which make explicit the procedures and ethics of entering and exiting the field (Burgess, R., 1984), and demystify the techniques of ethnography such as participant observation (Jackson, 1983; Evans, 1988; Burawoy et al., 1991), in-depth interviewing (Minichiello et al., 1990), network analysis (Wallman, 1980, 1984) and semiotics (Greimas, 1990). However, there is still an absence of texts which provide guidance for the always complex, but rarely discussed, project of interpretative analysis (e.g. Strauss, 1987).

Many of the ethnographically-orientated guides advocate qualitative approaches for their ability to "convey the inner life and texture of . . . diverse social enclaves" (Lowe and Short, 1990, p. 7). Here lies an important contradiction. The emphasis of methodological texts tends to be the more familiar qualitative procedures of the ethnography, yet the most dominant strand of urban qualitative analysis is in the realm of textual and discursive readings.

Featherstone (1988), in the context of exploring the condition of post-modernity, notes that an empirical emphasis on representational realms provides a restrictive notion of experience and provides limited evidence of the 'everyday' dimension of meaning and practice. This is a concern shared by Jackson (1989, p. 177) who asserts that the emphasis on representation and discourse works "from a world of exterior surfaces and appearances to an inner world of meaning and experience". From a cultural studies perspective, Angela McRobbie (1991, p. 3), for example, argues for a return to a "phenomenological/empirical" field where it is possible to regain sight of the materiality of practices. Thrift (1991) also edges us back from the purely discursive and representational, suggesting that our worlds (including our cities) are becoming "over-wordy worlds" and that we are engaging in a middle-class obsession with our own middle-class constructions of social reality. Discursive and figurative representations are, of course, also practices, and must be understood in an ethnographic sense. Nor can we comfortably return to the belief that the social is extra-discursive. This said, the dominance of textual analyses may well be making the practices, motions and interchanges of the everyday fade from our understandings of the city. The centring of the cultural in understanding the city has been an important and necessary development, but perhaps it is time to think critically about the methods by which the cultural is understood.

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