



MFCO Working Paper Series

SPECIAL ISSUE: ENVIRONMENTS, SPACES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Editorial: Environments, spaces and transformations

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Introduction

This inaugural issue of the MFCO Working Paper Series draws together work that emerged from the *Environments, spaces and transformations* (5-6 June 2014) conference held at the University of Otago.¹ Early-career and postgraduate scholars from a range of disciplines gave papers which not only explored the intricate networks and assemblages of built forms and socio-spatial environments, but also the potentials for transformation of digital media and the cinematic, as well as artistic and experimental practices of and within, contested spaces.

The resultant articles in this collection engage with concepts of environment, space and transformation, asking questions about the creation of new identities, social relations, intervention, progressive politics, and change. The papers, whilst interdisciplinary, are organised around the themes of urban spatial practice, creativity and change, transforming education, and, rethinking law, media and aesthetics.

In drawing these papers together, we hope to highlight timely responses from a range of disciplines that contribute to significant on-going debates on the politics of space, the theorisation of the 'new', and to questions and understandings of environment.

Urban spatial practice, creativity and change

Madden's critical intervention in 'Knowledge spaces and the urban jungle: animal agency in geographical understandings of public space' takes issue with some geographic theory which implicitly or explicitly maintains an ontological split between human and animal. Drawing on new materialism, actor-network theory, and vitalist posthumanism, as well as through ethnography in Auckland involving her dog, SundayBoy, dog-mapping as everyday performance becomes a way of considering the 'transgressive possibility of movement' (p. 5). For Madden, embodied transformations and animal agencies entail new possibilities for 'transformative methodologies' (p. 11), as we come to recognise that 'dog-paths are not linear, they circle, backtrack, investigate the hidden spaces, the undergrowth, the thickets, the inhuman places' (p. 12).

In her article 'Onto-epistemological transgression: transforming urban food assemblages', Sharp explores several case studies of alternative food initiatives (AFI) in Auckland and their potential to transform the urban food landscape. Against Latouche's theory that alternatives are weak and residual (p. 12), Sharp particularly emphasises the intra-relational factor of phenomena like AFIs. The author uses the work of Barad to explain the foodscape transformations emerging from inter-acting individuals. AFIs allow people to reshape their relation with the food system and 'start revaluing the (social, cultural, environmental) meanings of food beyond mere commodities and objects of exchange' (p. 14).

Then, looking at the television series *The Dice Man*, Robinson explores the elements of chance and experimentalism provided by die rolling as a central part of tourism. These touristic practices highlight the 'inherent creativity in everyday interactions' (p. 14), and allow any space to become momentarily touristic. For Robinson, 'creative tourism' favours everyday human engagement with the spatial environment. Robinson especially draws on the work of Crouch and Edensor to argue that tourism can be considered as a performance within the everyday rather than an escape from it.

Transforming education

'Seeking spaces to transform learning about sustainability in higher education' by Brown and Shephard raises interesting questions about ethnography, method, the possibility of institutional change, what constitutes 'empowerment', and the generation of new learning

spaces. Offering early reflection on a long-term project at a New Zealand university which looks at ways of developing student-led initiatives around sustainability education, they work through issues and challenges which have appeared throughout the project so far, discuss 'formative feedback and change within the research process' (p. 7), and consider action research in relation to participatory action research.

In her article 'Transforming a methodological landscape from deficit to growth in mathematics education research', Anakin challenges the methodological landscape of mathematics education. Rather than attributing students' errors to a deficiency as per the Newman hierarchy, Anakin argues for fluency as an alternative scholastic measure to indicate the knowledge that the student does demonstrate. 'Fluency represents the mathematical structure expressed in students' answers and explanations' (p. 6) and supports a growth-oriented approach that would change the landscape of mathematical education.

Rethinking law, media and aesthetics

Di Lieto in 'Free trade in labour: A new global space for workers' rights?' critiques the tensions between free trade and labour rights issues. Asking whether a more coherent programme of international labour standards might serve 'to ensure the protection of basic human and labour rights for those who cross borders' (p. 13) as well as enable innovation, Di Lieto concludes in favour of the liberalisation of labour movement as well as the enhancement of labour rights which would work against prevailing norms of the migrant as outsider (lodged within regimes of 'indentured dependence' [p. 14]). He suggests that this could mean labour would no longer '[veer] between loopholes and blind spots of applicable legal frameworks' (p. 14) as demand dictates.

Examining space and social control, Tippet's paper – 'Social media as surveillance: Digital spaces and the societies of control' contributes to debates on the relevancy of the panoptic disciplinary model for contemporary surveillance spaces. He argues with Foucault and Deleuze that control only retains the abstract form of disciplinary technologies: '*to impose a particular conduct on a particular human multiplicity*' (Deleuze, cited in Tippet, p. 2). Tippet goes on to suggest that the promise of the quotidian functioning of Google's

geolocative patent (US 20100287178 A1) (to enable the simulation, tracking and prediction of user locations and behaviour) is exemplary of contemporary post-panoptic control society that renders individuals self-responsible and serviceable to capital (p. 19).

Stapleton contrasts the spatial and temporal connectedness occurring in the 1960s rockumentaries and 1970s rock documentaries with the antichronotopic punkumentaries of late 1970s/ early 1980s. Using Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and the carnivalesque, Stapleton emphasises the disillusioned grotesque bodies of the punk movement and its translation into an antichronotopic cinematic aesthetic. Being temporary spaces, punk clubs also exemplify the day-to-day experience of the documentary subject and their 'perverse celebration of the absence of any future' (p. 1). Compared to rock documentaries, punkumentaries subvert every expectation through time-space contraction reflecting a 'dysfunctional social world' (p. 13).

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Endnotes

1. The aim of the *MFCO Working Paper Series* is to rapidly circulate on-going research in the fields of media, culture and society (broadly defined) to the wider research community and interested individuals. The *Series* seeks to promote inter- and trans-disciplinary work across the humanities and social sciences.