

Call for Papers (articles and book reviews)

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Public space in East Asia.
Visuality, performativity and interactions in socialist contexts

Special issue coordinated by **Pierre Petit** (Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium), **Vanessa Frangville** (Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium) & **Lisa Richaud** (Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium)

Few studies in the social sciences have explored the complex and entangled transformations of public spaces in the varied socialist contexts of East Asia (limited in this issue to China, Vietnam and Laos). As the revolutionary socialist project was altered by the emergence of State-controlled capitalism and a consumer society partially opened to global flows from the 1980s onward, practices and imaginaries developed around public spaces have been deeply impacted. Motorised mobility, for instance, has become accessible to most citizens and dramatically changed traffic practices (Qian 2015); the development of real-estate projects radically transformed the urban fabric (Harms 2016); new forms of consumption by emerging middle-classes and increasingly autonomous youths triggered the creation of new spaces to adapt to new expectations; processes of patrimonialisation have created new symbolic maps; hybrid publics have emerged through migrations as well as domestic and international tourism; political and police scrutiny are increasingly supported by new surveillance technologies; and the Internet has created a virtual space that duplicates and influences interactions and usages in physical spaces.

Scholars working on public spaces in East Asian socialist contexts often limit their research to one specific country or area (Gaubatz 2019; Gibert 2014; Kim 2015; J. Qian 2018; Kurfürst 2012). This special issue, by contrast, offers an original crosscutting perspective on societies that share many similarities (McGee 2009). Contributors will discuss the transformations of public spaces while remaining alert to their physical, visual and interactional features. From this perspective, public spaces differ from public *spheres*, which, in Habermas' approach (1978 [1962]), mainly refer to the locus for social debate and political deliberation. Public space in this special issue is instead defined by its assumed accessibility to all; by the visibility of the actions, events, or situations unfolding through them; and by a certain type of sociability that goes beyond "minimal interactions" in urban traffic as described by Hannerz (1980). As such, visuality, performativity and interactions are at the heart of the conceptual stakes raised by this special issue.

Parks, markets, lively squares and busy shopping streets immediately come to mind; however, our scope of interest also includes museums, temples, food courts, spaces dedicated to celebration, leisure and sports. The list of public spaces cannot be restrictive, as the publicness of a space is never settled. Indeed, empirical studies have arguably challenged the private/public dichotomy, including in the West where the distinction was initially theorized. This porosity takes specific forms in East Asia, where domestic spaces overlap with external spaces (*inside out*), and conversely domestic spaces are opened to the outside gaze, if not to State agents (*outside in*). (Drummont, 2000; Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 57; Kim 2015). Moreover, these spaces are marked by a history that has affected their nature, which itself is shaped and altered through different temporalities: political temporalities – as State congresses or public celebration days (Richaud 2016a) may take place –, as well as casual temporalities such as the time of the day, days of the week, or seasons.

Accelerated film images of the occupation of a public space throughout a day are useful indicators of the significance of this temporality that research often overlooks (*Hanoi Youth*).

Considering their physical, symbolic and memory-related features, public spaces encompass important political issues. A privileged setting for State propaganda, public spaces are also spaces to gather and protest, as reminded by the Tian'anmen demonstrations in Beijing in 1989 (Wu 2005). This special issue seeks to highlight the diverse modes of political agency in public spaces, as well as the ways in which political agency can itself be a product of spatiality (Butler 2015). How did propaganda evolve (or not) with the development of digital technologies and the spread of commercial advertising? How do passer-by and other users receive these messages? What are the modes of adherence, resistance, circumvention or indifference in this new context, and how are these modes shaped through physical space itself? What can we learn about strategies to attract and retain attention through visuals in public spaces in socialist contexts? Furthermore, to what extent can we look at users' activities in public spaces through the lens of politics, when playfulness, sensorial and emotional experiences prevail in the analysis (Farquhar 2009; Petit 2013; Qian 2014a; Richaud 2016b, 2018)? How can individual experiences and practices exposed to the public gaze be taken into consideration?

Engaging with Goffman, Hannerz (1980) has highlighted the benefit of an interactionist perspective on urban spaces. Interactions unfolding in public spaces in socialist East Asia, however, have barely been explored in concrete terms. How can we qualify interactions between users, which are seemingly characterised by openness while retaining the need to protect one's intimacy and reputation (Qian 2014b; Richaud 2018) – except of course when public trials are performed in these spaces? What methodological and conceptual approaches can help to understand the specific structure of interactions in public spaces? What are the material, visual and sonic arrangements that give public spaces an atmosphere that fosters exchanges? How do intergenerational relationships develop in these spaces (in terms of transmission of memory, for instance), as well as relationships between genders, socioeconomic classes or other assigned categories? What is at stake, for the authoritarian regimes explored here, in these very forms of “stranger-sociability” (Warner 2002)?

Beyond their explicit function, how do certain public places achieve the status of symbolic, or even “iconic sites” (Edensor 2002: 45)? How do they contribute to the social production of “collectives of belonging” (Hilgers 2009), along various scales ranging from the neighbourhood to the city; and from the nation to the global ecumene? How do people related to these various spheres come into contact, and in possible friction, notably when tourism intensifies, or when processes of heritagisation transform the very status of an area (Berliner 2010)? How do social actors appropriate the symbolic value of a place, through perambulation, gestures, consumption or photograph – with selfies posted on social networks in real time?

Visuality, performativity and interactions are at the heart of the conceptual stakes raised by this special issue. Based on contextualised and historicised empirical research, the authors are invited to adopt a reflexive stance on methodology, concepts, theoretical frames, and research ethics, in order to foster mutual heuristic benefits. The journal welcomes figures, maps, photographs, screenshots, and other visual documents. Long and short reviews of recent (2015-) books on the topic are equally welcome.

Article proposals, in French or in British English (a title and a 300-word abstract) are to be sent to the journal office (civilisations@ulb.ac.be) by 30 September 2019.

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