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# SHAME, GUILT, AND THE PRODUCTION OF URBAN SPACE

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## **Abstract**

Guilt and shame operate in connection with individual and collective forces. This paper explores how space is contingent in psychic processes, and how the generation and negotiation of feelings of guilt and shame develop in the interplay between internal processes of the mind and the worldly 'outside'. By presenting two examples, precisely commodity consumption and sex, and a set of fictional anecdotes, the article proposes a series of hypotheses concerning distance, proximity and visibility in relation to shame and guilt, and it analyses mechanisms of resistance to guilt and shame, which include spatial architectures of concealment, displacement and mimesis. It is argued that an explicit recognition of the role of guilt and shame in shaping urban spaces may lead to a better understanding of the mechanics of production of space, may contribute to further bridging geographical and psychoanalytical debates, and may have a political and transformative potential, with meaningful geographical implications.

## **Keywords**

commodities, guilt, psychoanalytic geographies, sex, shame

## **I Introduction**

This article speculates on the multiple and variegated roles played by guilt and shame in shaping everyday urban spaces. If, on the one hand, disciplines such as psychology and philosophy have widely emphasised the powerfulness of these feelings and emotions in shaping lives and relations, relatively little attention has been paid to them in geography. This article seeks to fill this gap by reflecting on the geographies of shame and guilt, and by mobilising them as analytical categories with which to interpret space. The implicit premise of this exercise is the idea that emotions, feelings and affects are spatial phenomena, as explored by an abundant body of literature developed over, at least, the past two decades (see for example Anderson and Smith, 2001; Davidson et al., 2007; Pile, 2010). This means, among other things, that emotions such as guilt and shame take form in space; they are incorporated, symbolised and decoded in space; they are experienced spatially; they shape relations which take form in space; and they are also

encountered, imagined and represented in space. As will be further discussed in this article, according to the classic psychoanalytical framing, guilt can be 'located' both in the conscious and in the unconscious mind, and hence it can be difficult to access in rational and representational terms. The location of guilt is therefore often invisible, and it is no coincidence that acknowledging and fully understanding the role of guilt in our lives is generally a complex process: it often requires difficult analyses or therapies. Put differently, it is hard to 'map' these feelings, at both the individual and collective levels.

Guilt and shame have been analysed with an emphasis on both the personal, individual level (typically in the psychological and psychoanalytical literatures) and the collective one (for example in sociology, social philosophy and political philosophy), where of course the two levels are closely interconnected, mutually constructed and interdependent. According to Scheff (2003: 255),

shame is the large family of emotions that includes many cognates and variants, most notably embarrassment, [. . .] humiliation, and related feelings such as shyness that originate in threats to the social bond. This definition integrates self (emotional reactions) and society (the social bond).

As argued by Chase and Walker (2013), emotions connected to shame frequently remain unnamed, and the word 'shame' itself seem to have an aura of taboo.

As anticipated, guilt and shame are in many cases ambiguous, mysterious and largely invisible social forces, which do not always manifest themselves as such (Tangney and Dearing, 2003). By extension, guilt and shame may overlap with other dynamics, contributing, for example, to the shaping of spaces of fear, violence, exclusion or pleasure. The overall aim of this paper is to propose a conceptual framework in which to identify, map, classify and discuss the spatialities and architectures of guilt and shame. The main argument proposed is that a focus on guilt and shame yields novel and further understandings of spatial phenomena. On the one hand, guilt and shame are generated by processes unfolding in space; on the other hand, a number of spatial configurations may be *also* explained in relation to the mechanisms that generate guilt and shame, and to the desire to defend oneself from those painful feelings. Specifically, the two cases of commodity consumption and sex are discussed as exemplifying these processes.

Clearly, different cultures, societies and ideologies frame guilt and shame in very different ways. This article deals only with mainstream, 'Western' conceptualisations and studies, emphasising for example psychoanalytical understandings of guilt and shame, the crucial role of consumerism in shaping society, or that of Christian cultures in influencing shameful feelings about sex. This is clearly a very limited perspective, and a much more variegated set of reflections may be developed by grounding guilt and shame in different cultural and geographical settings.

The discussion that follows is mostly based on theoretical speculations; but several anecdotes and examples, in the form of quotes, are cited throughout the paper. These examples are fictional, because the phrases reported are not extracted from any 'real interview'. They instead relate to ideal-typical vignettes, stories that I heard, or personal experiences. The firstperson singular is used only for stylistic purposes, in order to build a convincing narrative, but quotes do not strictly refer to autobiographical memories. This methodological choice may appear subjective; but it may also be considered effective for the purposes of this paper, given the

unconscious nature of the phenomena investigated, as well as recent contributions in the field of creative methodologies in geography. In particular, Rabbiosi and Vanolo (2017) discuss the use of fictional vignettes as a methodological means with which to describe situations that do not strictly concern factual realities observed by an author but implement the heuristics for the arguments that the author wants to raise.

The article is organised as follows. The next section surveys the literature on shame and guilt across different disciplines, particularly psychoanalysis and social sciences. It is followed by Section III, which discusses the spatial dimensions of guilt and shame. In order to develop the argument, two examples are then presented: they refer to the spatialities of commodity consumption (III.1), and to sexual experiences (III.2). Finally, the concluding section summarises key arguments, and it poses questions which may be addressed in geography.

## **II Framing shame and guilt**

Sigmund Freud did not write any book fully focused on guilt. Nevertheless, the concept traversed many of Freud's works, and he perhaps can be considered the father of the systematic study of the sense of guilt (Speziale-Bagliacca, 2004; Westerink, 2009). Specifically, he developed the idea that the *psychological* category of guilt is characterised by meanings and logics which differ from moral and legal categories. The influential 1925 *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* described guilt in binary factual terms: 'the state of having committed a crime, or consciously offended against a moral law. The absence of guilt is innocence' (quoted in Speziale-Bagliacca, 2004: 2). Freud introduced dimensions extending beyond 'objective' guilt by considering personal experience, for example feelings of remorse. In this regard, he distinguished between (i) 'guilt' understood in rational, moral and juridical terms, and (ii) 'sense of guilt' (or 'awareness of guilt'), which is unconscious and has its source in psychic processes. Nevertheless, he did not propose any definite and conclusive theory of the sense of guilt: he mostly mapped connections with other psychic phenomena and with culture, and in this sense, Westerink (2009, p. X) suggests that guilt has been an 'area of attention' which Freud developed in parallel with other perspectives. Hence, his thinking about the sense of guilt developed by means of other debates and other conceptualisations, including for example self-reproach and the need for punishment. Depending on the context and the moment in which he was analysing it, Freud framed and conceptualised the sense of guilt in different ways, and he did not merge his different understandings of the sources of a sense of guilt into a coherent whole.

Although several ideas appear in some of Freud's early writings, his 1913 book *Totem and Taboo* is widely considered a starting point in speculations on feelings of guilt. Developing the idea of the Oedipus complex, Freud suggested that religions have to be considered in relation to extended and collective forms of unconscious guilt to cope with the killing of the father figure. Guilt is thus understood as a universal and unconscious feeling, connected to the antagonism between the logics of society (i.e. the survival of civilisation) and the drives of the subject. In his early works, Freud explicitly used the expression 'unconscious sense of guilt' in order to emphasise the role of repression, which uncouples affect from the original idea. In his 1914 work on narcissism, Freud proposed the idea of guilt in relation to the development of the agencies of the ego ideal, the ideal ego and the superego, a perspective which he mobilised in a number of subsequent works. These agencies refer to the normative and motivational aspects of the

psyche, and they are formed through the influence of parents, educators and other subjects in the environment. Particularly, the ego ideal is strongly situated in time and space, because it is grounded in common ideals of family, class and nation, among others. According to Freud, the non-realisation of the ideal generates a variety of dynamics, including libidinal ones, ultimately transformed into guilt. A number of pathologies may therefore arise, as in the case of obsessional neurosis, where a sadistic impulse toward a loved one results in a sense of guilt that is then repressed. In later works, Freud further analysed instances of guilt in relation to specific categories and characters, proposing various hypotheses concerning the origins of the sense of guilt, which he connected for example to death drives or to delusional expectations of punishment, as in the case of subjects suffering from what is felt to be an unjustified degree of success (as described, for instance, in his 1916 essay 'Some Charactertypes Met with in Psychoanalytic Work').

In parallel with the analysis of the origins of guilt, the psychoanalytic literature has explored how the mechanics of the mind reveal a number of different mechanisms for exploiting the sense of guilt (that is, transforming it into pleasure, for example through masochism or various forms of 'forbidden' sexual excitement: Freud, 1924; Westerink, 2009), and most commonly for avoiding, preventing, or displacing it. These include: repression (disturbing or threatening thoughts are kept from becoming conscious); denial (an uncomfortable wish, desire, memory or emotion is pushed away from awareness); regression (a form of retreat by moving back in psychological time, for example by enacting childish or primitive behaviours); projections (attributing unwanted thoughts, feelings and motives onto another person); displacement (redirecting a goal felt to be dangerous or unacceptable onto a powerless symbolic substitute subject or object, as in the case of a person yelling at home after a bad day at work); and sublimation (substitution of a goal with constructive and socially acceptable activities, such as the arts) (cf. Speziale-Bagliacca, 2004). Particularly through projection and sublimation, which were discussed by Freud in his 1915 essay 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', the sense of guilt is stripped from the self and transferred subtly or violently onto someone or something else, causing for example the desire to make them feel guilty, or to seek some forms of revenge or forgiveness (two attitudes that are not necessarily in opposition with each other). It is also a defensive strategy with which to avoid experiencing 'real' responsibilities, which means not feeling any kind of remorse for shameful actions. Clearly, socio-cultural dynamics play a crucial role in sanctioning and/or exculpating certain behaviours and certain subjects, while criminalising others. From a Freudian perspective, society plays a role quite similar to that of parents in imposing or removing the sense of guilt (Beer, 2017). For children, the sense of guilt is basically a fear of losing love, and from a Freudian perspective for many adults the dynamic changes only in terms of scale, 'to the extent that the place of the father or the two parents is taken by the larger human community' (Freud, 1961 [1930]: 72). People often allow themselves to act badly – that is, engage in potentially guilt-provoking behaviours – in order to access pleasure and enjoyment, as long as they are sure that the authorities will not blame them, or at least do not know anything about it. Freud (1961 [1930]) employed a geographical metaphor in order to describe the dramatic loss of happiness that takes place through the growth of the sense of guilt: it is like a 'garrison in a conquered city' (p. 72), an image of invasion and domination that, according to Beer (2017), is quite similar to Foucault's images of power's domination through forms of architectural control, such as the Panopticon.

Basically, the Freudian understanding of the origins of the sense of guilt specifies two distinct mechanisms: one is *internal*, arising from the fear of the super-ego and insisting upon renunciation of instinctual satisfaction (or, as argued by Žižek, 2002, arising from the disregard of the super-egoic induction to *enjoy*); the other one is *external*, arising from authority and society, and pressing for punishment. Consistently with this schematisation, a number of scholars, particularly in the field of anthropology, have drawn a rough distinction between the two concepts of *guilt* and *shame*, assuming that the latter is a more ‘public’ emotion than the former. In this framework, shame is seen as arising from public exposure and disapproval of some frailty or failing, whereas guilt is seen as a more private and intimate experience (see the classic and highly influential works of Ruth Benedict, 1946, and Eric Dodds, 1951; see also Piers and Singer, 1953). However, this distinction has been widely criticised as simplistic and inconsistent, because both shame and guilt are most often experienced through inter-personal relations, and shame may also occur in solitude (Tangney and Dearing, 2003). Nor is it possible to distinguish between guilt and shame on the basis of different types of transgression and failure, since similar actions may be experienced as provoking either shame or guilt for different subjects in different settings.

A crucial contribution to the conceptualisation of the two feelings has been made by Helen Block Lewis (1971). In her ground-breaking book *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, she focused on the role of the self in these experiences. While the experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation (*‘I did that horrible thing’*), in the case of guilt the focus is on the behaviour (*‘I did that horrible thing’*). Put differently, shame is described as a painful emotion that is typically accompanied by a sense of ‘being small’, worthless and powerless, and by the desire to *put distance*, hide or disappear. Instead, in the case of guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something done or not done, which can be eventually smoothed away by an act of reparation, but the self is not itself the focus (Probyn, 2005). Guilt thus seems to be less devastating because the primary concern is a particular behaviour and not the core of one’s identity: it typically generates tension, remorse or regret, and the desire to confess, apologise or repair. But it is also possible that ‘feeling bad’ may be experienced as a sign of virtue, allowing people to do what they otherwise know they should not do (*‘I feel bad about betraying my partner, and hence probably I am not really a bad person’*) (Ahmed, 2010). Overall, this rich body of literature stresses that similar experiences and situations may give rise to both guilt and shame; hence it is often difficult to generalise a priori about them. Consequently, in the rest of this paper, both terms will be employed.

In the social sciences, psychoanalytic understandings of shame and guilt have inspired a number of different lines of investigation. One example has to do with poverty: Amartya Sen (1983) placed shame at the core of his understanding of the concept of poverty, and other scholars have explored its complex construction, involving feelings of shame (both for the poor and for the privileged subject encountering the poor), feelings of ‘being shamed’, empathy-based guilt, and cultural constructions producing distance and othering (Chase and Walker, 2013; Gubrium and Pellissery, 2013; Oakley et al., 2012; Walker and Bantebya-Kyomuhendo, 2014).

In political philosophy, a long tradition of scholars – from Aristotle to Sartre, from Kant to Scheler, from Nietzsche to Elias, including contemporary ones such as John Rawls, Bernard Williams and Martha Nussbaum – have discussed guilt, shame, and their moral dimensions. John Rawls (1971), for example, drawing on Freudian ideas, identifies three types of sense of guilt:

(a) the first concerns conflicts with authority, as in the parent-child relationship; (b) the second refers to clashes with institutions, for example in the form of conflicts with colleagues; (c) the third develops in relation to moral principles. In the first two cases, guilty subjects fear an external punishment, while in the third case they feel guilty internally in regard to their consciences. While this line of reflection focuses on guilt as an individual feeling, Hannah Arendt (1945, 1963) reflects on *collective* dimensions of guilt. According to her, guilt (and innocence) applies to individuals and not to large groups, because when everyone is guilty, no one feels guilty. Rather, she emphasises the idea of 'collective responsibility', which is a political responsibility rather than a moral or legal one. Referring to the case of Nazi Germany, Arendt argues that political responsibility refers to membership of a group which no individual action can dissolve. By mobilising this framework, Iris Marion Young (2011) maps different 'positionalities' – i.e. different ways to take responsibility and create distance from the tragedy – in relation to the mass murder of Jews. Various authors have employed the conceptual apparatus of collective responsibility in order to explore case studies in different geographical settings (see for example the edited collection by Branscombe et al., 2004; see also Ahmed, 2004). In a different way, Elspeth Probyn (2005), who has had a massive influence on cultural and feminist geographies, conceives shame as both an individual and a collective feeling. For example, she discusses the political and transformative potential of shame in relation to *pride*, understood specifically as national, gay and black pride. By stressing the crucial role of both individual and collective shame in rethinking who we are and who we want to be, Probyn emphasises its potentially productive effects subverting the typical understanding of guilt and shame as negative feelings, implying, for example, disgust and punishment (Nussbaum, 2004). By drawing on the works of psychoanalyst Silvan Tomkins, Probyn (2005) argues that shame is our bodies' way of telling us that we are interested, for example in our collective and individual histories marked by trauma, or in living ethically. It may act as a switch point for imagining consciousness, bodies, theories, selves, identities and distinction.

### **III Psychoanalytic geographies and the spatialities of guilt**

Psychoanalysis has had a great impact on humanities but apparently only a limited one on geography. There are several contributions in the field of psychoanalytic geography, but the literature is not as large as one might think. This section will not fully review the geographical literature on this subject (in this regard, see for example Kingsbury, 2004, 2009); rather, it considers two key connections between psychoanalysis and geography.

First, psychoanalysis often mobilises spatial thinking. Freud, for example, proposed a topological model of the mind (Freud, 1900; Bondi, 2014); he described the unconscious in terms of a process of 'contiguity of ideas', of thoughts associated with one another through some kind of closeness (Kingsbury and Pile, 2014). Ideas of closeness and proximity are also mobilised in the relation between repressed ideas and psychic and somatic symptoms; moreover, as discussed, guilt has been (also) framed in relation to the 'distance' between the self and the ideal ego. Key ideas of psychoanalysis, such as transference, are connected to spatial perspectives and spatial metaphors. Among the various spatial metaphors deployed by Freud, there is his conceptualisation of the libido as a fluid flow, and his description of the restorative outcomes of psychotherapy as the reclamation of flooded lands, like the draining of the Zuyder Zee (Nash, 1962). More generally, Freud often evokes geographical images of landscapes, cities or nations,

and similar considerations may apply to other key authors such as Lacan, Klein, Laing, Kristeva or Winnicott (Kingsbury, 2014).

Secondly, psychic processes do not fully form in the intimacy of the mind; rather, they have their origins in the external world (Pile, 2014; Kingsbury and Pile, 2014), and in this sense 'psychoanalysis has offered geographers a way to understand the unconscious on the outside' (Kingsbury and Pile, 2014: 5). With this perspective in mind, Pile (1996) affirms that the most important shared concern for geography and psychoanalysis is the relationship of the individual to both an 'internal' or 'inner' world, and an 'external' or 'outer' world. He put all these terms in inverted commas in order to emphasise that these categories are in some form of dynamic relationship with each another. Assuming similar perspectives, psychoanalytic approaches have been mobilised, for example, in the field of emotional geographies, where scholars have focused on the role of emotions within complex sets of unfolding intersubjective relations and representations (Bondi, 2005; Curti et al., 2011; Davidson et al., 2007; Pile, 2010; Smith et al., 2009; Thrift, 2008).

Overall, the body of literature on psychoanalytic geographies rarely deals explicitly with feelings of guilt and shame. The two words occur occasionally, but generally without a specific focus. There are some notable exceptions, particularly in the following works: Waitt et al. (2007) on moralities, indigenous knowledge and pride/shame amongst the Australian Uluru population; Naraghi (2014) on shame in Iran; Longhurst et al. (2012), on clashing emotions in single mothers engaged in higher education in New Zealand; Longhurst (2014) on feelings of shame in relation to body size; and Johnston (2007, 2019) on the geographies of guilt and shame in relation to gay pride parades, body size and sport. With the sole exception of Naraghi (2014), all these contributions build on Probyn's (2005) conceptualisation of shame and pride, emphasising the role of shame in collective processes of identity formation. These works mostly develop geographical perspectives by proposing situated analysis and by focusing on the relational space between subjects in shame and wider socio-political settings and cultural frameworks.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the existing literature by focusing on spatial dimensions and understandings of guilt and shame as they develop in the interplay between the 'internal' and the 'external'. Specifically, it is possible to outline some spatial dimensions of guilt and shame emerging from the abovementioned literature:

- Shame and guilt can be engendered by *closeness* to a psychological object related to a sense of guilt or shame (the encounter with a poor individual, with a person harmed by one's actions, the bad outcomes of personal behaviour; cf. Oakley et al., 2012; Wilson, 2017). However, contiguity with guilt and shame may be also generated at a geographical *distance*, without actual bodily contact, and without real, factual, logical and mechanical relations with personal behaviours (cf. Ahmed, 2004).
- Shame and guilt may produce very different predispositions to contact, ranging from forgiveness to violence, desire to punish and be punished, to the desire to 'disappear' from space. Overall, these predispositions can be also interpreted in relation to the need to defend oneself against guilt and shame, or to remove the pain and suffering caused by them through processes including repression, denial, regression, projection or sublimation. Such processes, as will be further discussed in the paper, have meaningful spatial dimensions.
- Guilt and shame have non-linear relations with the visibility and invisibility of personal and social phenomena. They are often connected to invisible processes operating in relations



with intimate and inaccessible strata of the mind, which are difficult to detect in the external world, but they may also develop in quite conscious and explicit forms.

With these perspectives in mind, this paper does not assume that specific spaces *are* guilty, i.e. that they are entirely (or predominantly) defined by individual and collective feelings of guilt and shame. These feelings are experienced and develop in the interplays between subjective inner worlds and the external one, where they find their origins. Consequently, space is not only a container of sources of guilt and shame, and it cannot be simply 'filled' with guilt and shame. Rather, space is a crucial and complex factor in the unfolding of the processes of origination, experience, negotiation and defence against them. As a result, everyday spaces may commonly and partly sustain, embed and be shaped by these processes. This paper seeks to draw a tentative map of the role of these feelings in the production of everyday spaces (for a somewhat similar logical construction, see the inspiring work of Maddrell, 2016). Specifically, the discussion that follows moves among (and in-between) three different spatial perspectives:

- the physical space directly produced in relation to guilt and shame;
- the embodied spaces where guilt and shame develop, recognising the complexity of internal emotional and psychological dynamics;
- the political, symbolical and representational spaces where guilt and shame take shape, are socialised, and exert their effects.

The analysis then addresses two different themes referring to the spatialities of guilt and shame in relation to the consumption of commodities (Section III.1), and to the experience and consumption of sex (Section III.2). The two examples overlap in many ways, since they both relate to different forms of consumption, but they reveal different mechanisms involving issues of distance, proximity and visibility, and the enactment of spatial strategies of concealment, displacement and mimesis.

### *III.1 Commodities and their discontents*

'Consumerism' is an ambiguous term because it evokes both the worlds of ephemeral pleasure and that of guilt and shame. This short section discusses the consumption of commodities as a situated practice in relation to guilt and shame. This is an ambiguous relation: if, on the one hand, it is well known that consumerism as we know it is unjust and unsustainable, the idea that society is shaped by the choices of sovereign independent citizens-consumers is, on the other hand, foundational in mainstream conceptualisations of capitalism (cf. Schwarzkopf, 2011). However, the consumption of commodities is a rich and variegated moral phenomenon as evidenced by cases of the quest for 'ethical' and 'alternative' practices (see for example Barnett et al., 2005; Mansvelt, 2005; Popke, 2006; Clarke, 2008; Hall, 2015).

There are clearly many 'rational' reasons (i.e. located in the 'external' world, according to Freudian schematisation) for feeling ashamed about consuming everyday commodities. They include issues of environmental impact, resource depletion, pollution, exploitation of labour, social injustice. Also to be cited are guilty emotions characterised by 'internal' dynamics significantly related to the interplay between the ego and the superego (and the ideal-self), as in the case of sensations of drinking, eating or spending 'too much' (Nixon and Gabriel, 2016). It is also possible to mention the case of guilt and shame in relation to consumption and the

performance of gendered identities. As discussed by feminist scholars, feminine consumption is widely practised in relation to gendered domestic responsibilities, and ideas of masculinity and femininity are constantly shaped and reproduced by production, marketing, retail and advertising (see, for example, De Grazia and Furlough, 1996). Feelings of guilt and shame, or defence against them, are widely connected with strategies of conformity and resistance in consumption practices.

Defensive strategies, which may be enacted in order to avoid the painful effects of guilt and shame, are therefore crucial elements in the production and performance of spaces of consumption. By combining the theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous sections of the paper, it is possible to conceive repression, denial, regression, projection and sublimation as defensive mechanisms. Typical examples, which may easily overlap, are:

- compensating between different spheres ('I feel ashamed about possessing a car, *but* I have to say that I always sort my waste for recycling'; 'I buy books *but not* on Amazon; I consume *but* I also donate money to charity');
- concealing consumption, i.e. engaging in covert consumption of which family and friends are unaware ('I will not tell my friends that I spent the whole day in a shopping mall');
- projecting shame onto other people by shaming their bad or excessive consumption habits, in order to represent and selfrepresent one's own behaviour as *less* shameful;
- denying specific elements of consumption practices, such as the act of buying ('I didn't buy these expensive leather shoes: I received them as a present');
- denying negative effects of consumption by regression, particularly by deliberately choosing to believe in simplified understandings of reality, for example by assuming that a green car is not harmful for the environment, or that by sorting waste one is performing good citizenship (cf. Brand, 2007), or by completely denying the negative effects of consumption, as in the well-known case of President Trump's understanding of oil consumption and climate change;
- displacing guilt by embracing nihilism or inertia ('my efforts are meaningless when compared to the scope of global problems');
- displacing shame by sharing feelings, attitudes and practices with friends, seeking consensus and reframing negative attitudes in ironic and distinctive terms ('let's do this stupid thing, all together!'; 'let's try to eat a kilo of meat and make fun of the vegans');
- displacing and sublimating guilt by attributing alternative meanings to consumption, for example by reframing commodity consumption as cultural consumption (as done by foodies), or health consciousness (healthy food), or simply by considering consumption as a duty, as in the case of some stereotyped gendered constructions ('I have to shop as part of my role of wife/mother'; cf. Cairns and Johnston, 2015);
- avoiding consumption, i.e. choosing *not* to consume. There are various reasons for non-consumption, including the desire to save money, inertia, boredom, the desire to delay a purchase, as well as consumer disengagement, ideological protest, or antagonist alterity against market logics (Nixon and Gabriel, 2016). Nonconsumption may be viewed as an active practice, and not just a passive and marginal absence of consumption; but it is not necessarily a form of resistance.

It is likely that a range of economic actors, including corporations, shop-owners, advertising agencies, brand managers, and policymakers willing to support economic growth (at least in the

more traditional sense of the word) are keen to promote all the above-mentioned defensive strategies, with the sole exclusion of the last one (non-consumption), in order to foster consumption and capital circulation. The geographical literature has widely discussed how the contemporary urban experience is largely shaped by consumption, including the massive fetishisation, spectacularisation and commodification of (almost) everything, and how the urban landscape supports the pleasures of consumption, including fantasies of commodity consumption (as explored, for example, by Hannigan, 1998). However, there is a gap in the literature because the role of space in providing protection against guilt and shame is largely neglected. Given that guilt and shame originate from a variety of processes involving the self and the external world, space can be manipulated in order to protect citizens-consumers in the performance of their consumption practices and consumer identities. The psychoanalytic perspective thus makes it possible to develop a view on the 'the world's unconscious worlds' (Kingsbury and Pile, 2014: 5) with specific reference to the sphere of the spatialities of consumption. With this perspective in mind, it is possible to use the list of defensive strategies set out earlier in this section in order to sketch types of spatial arrangement which may be (also) interpreted as elements of defensive strategy. Overall, these examples depict the contours of what we may call the *architecture* of spatial resistance to guilt and shame.

First, there is spatial *concealment*. Spaces reflecting the 'darkest sides' of the life of commodities are simply hidden (Mansvelt, 2005). This 'invisibilisation' occurs both in the sphere of production, for example with reference to resource depletion or inhuman working conditions, and in the after-lives of consumed commodities, as in the case of the massive accumulation of solid waste (Moore, 2012). Spaces marked by resource depletion, as well as landfills, are commonly concealed from the gaze of consumers, particularly in the very moment when they perform purchases. This spatial arrangement may be interpreted in relation to the above-mentioned psychological strategies of concealment, regression and negation, which are ways to place consumption within a set of conscious and unconscious relations that undermine and limit potential senses of guilt and shame by 'looking away'.

Secondly, and largely overlapping with the previous category, there is spatial *displacement*. The case of waste collection is crucial: by sorting waste, the 'good citizen' introduces unwanted stuff into a kind of 'magic portal' (the waste bin), where objects and guilty feelings are removed, being 'teleported' into a different time/space, for example an (imaginary) high-technology industrial site where they are sustainably (and easily) re-transformed into natural resources. An even more powerful 'magic portal' may be helping people in morally virtuous terms by donating my second-hand, unwanted objects, for example by putting used clothes in specific street bins. It is no coincidence that many global brands, such as Zara, explicitly support this phenomenon ('Bring the clothes you no longer wear and give them a new life', according to a Zara advertisement<sup>1</sup>). The spatial arrangement is somehow the opposite of the previous one: guilt and shame are removed through the conceptualisation of a (real or imagined) *elsewhere* where the negative outcomes of consumption practices do not take form or are compensated, or where consumption is ultimately transformed into a virtuous practice, for example by mobilising mechanisms of regression, projection and sublimation.

Guilt displacement also means *removing the presence of subjects which may make consumers feel guilty*, which is a strategy that can mobilise both concealment and displacement. The case

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://www.zara.com/es/en/sustainability-collection-program-l1452.html> (accessed 11 December 2019).

of poor people is emblematic, because for certain consumers, beggars, homeless persons and other marginalised subjects may act as symbolic referents for guilt and shame: they mark out the privilege of 'not being in their shoes' (see for example Gerrard and Farrugia, 2014). This mechanism may respond to different logics: empathy-based guilt refers to the positive and prosocial role of altruistic motivations, to the way we identify with one another and we react to others' pain, and to the impulse to care and help (Oakley et al., 2012). Yet it is also possible to think of forms of 'inequity guilt' (as well as 'survivor guilt') based on an irrational belief that one's own success, happiness, or well-being is a source of unhappiness for others (Oakley et al., 2012; in this regard, Sennett, 1991, uses the expression 'anxiety of privilege'). Both the production of spaces of care (such as shelters, soup kitchens, etc.; Barnett and Land, 2007), and the mobilisation of surveillance, design and policing techniques with which to 'clean' space (see for example the classic work by Smith, 1996) may be (also) considered spatial arrangements limiting the senses of guilt and shame, in the former case particularly through compensation, and in the latter through concealment and negation.

Third, the construction of *collective spaces* of consumption may be interpreted as a powerful mechanism for defence against guilt and shame. By performing potentially shameful actions 'all together', that is, by developing a herd mentality, shame may be socialised and then dissolved through the waves of an 'oceanic feeling' (to use another Freudian expression). This mechanism may be related to the formation of the ideal ego and the group ideal, where conformity plays a role in limiting guilt and shame: as mentioned, according to Arendt, when everyone is guilty, no one feels guilty. Spatial arrangements may therefore normalise consumption, ultimately supporting the collective representations of consumption practices as acceptable and unproblematic. Put simply, spaces of collective consumption may reassure and comfort us, suggesting that we do not have to fear losing the love of society. The case of long queues of people waiting all night long in order to be among the first to buy a new iPhone or PlayStation model are emblematic of the power exerted by the spatial socialisation of consumption practices (practices that, performed individually, probably look ridiculous to many).

Fourth, *spatial mimetics* enable the sublimation of guilt and shame by reframing meanings and discourses. The same commodities and the same consumption practices may be moralised and remoralised, consciously and unconsciously, by being positioned and performed in different spaces and contexts; for example, commodity consumption may be imbued with cultural meanings by being staged in a museum, or in the 'authentic' place to which the commodity belongs (as in the case of local foods). Narratives of culture, health and localism trigger powerful discursive frames, which are often place-specific (and that relate to specific identity constructs; for example, they are often gender-specific), resisting guilt and shame (Chatzidakis, 2015).

### *III.2 Sex and the city*

Also in the case of sex, and particularly in the case of the display and consumption of sexualised dreams, commodities and experiences, it is possible to conceive a number of spatial architectures related to shame and guilt. A preliminary hypothesis at the basis of this section is that, at least in Western societies, sexual guilt is still quite widespread for a number of social, cultural, religious and psychological reasons (Pajaczkowska and Ward, 2014). Of course, this is a generic and debatable statement, because in contemporary societies there are diverse

distinctive ways to consider and moralise sexualities and sexual practices (which hereafter will be simply labelled with the generic term 'sex'). Shame and guilt are by no means the main emotional spheres. Complex social, cultural, political and economic changes have engendered several forms of 'liberation' of sexual forces in broad sections of society; a 'liberation', however, which has been partial and socially uneven. This section follows the logical path of the previous one by identifying spatial mechanisms favouring defence against senses of guilt and shame, particularly by enacting processes of repression, negation, regression, projection and sublimation. In this regard, four main spatial architectures can be conceived.

First, there is the tendency to *conceal* spaces for sex, particularly in the case of 'shameful' sexual practices, which is basically the spatial dimension of processes of social negation. This may be the case of many forms of adult entertainment performed 'away from prying eyes' (Hubbard et al., 2008), or the case of kinky sexual practices (and sexual subjects), which are stigmatised and considered 'immoral' in heteronormative and patriarchal societies, and hence spatially marginalised (Hubbard, 2001; Herman, 2007). In a certain way, by removing certain guilty and shameful objects from sight, it is unconsciously possible to pretend they do not exist, and hence repress or mitigate painful emotions. This is coherent with the fact that sexual urban geographies are populated by a wide variety of 'secret' places allowing sexual activities and sexualised encounters at a distance from the eyes of people which may shame those engaging in those activities: this may be the case of spaces for cruising, cottaging, swinging, BDSM collective practices. Such spaces are often ephemeral, because they exist only during the night-time and disappear during the day, and they are invisible to many people. On a subtler level, the construction of stigmatised sexual identities often takes place 'in the closet', an expression used by Brown (2000) to refer to an everyday occurrence and as a metaphor based on spatial concealment. Travel and mobility are also strategies allowing the concealment of sexual practices and orientations for performing in the closet and escaping shame by engaging in sexual encounters at a distance from people that one might meet in everyday life, as in the case of sex tourism (cf. Gibson, 2010). Sexual mobility, however, does not necessarily work as a strategy for *concealment* because it may also allow *displacement* and *mimesis*: practices and ways of being which may generate shame in certain places, can be 'othered' in order to produce different meanings in distant places. For example, sex tourism may be perceived or imagined as 'less' shameful and 'exceptional' when performed 'far away' ('I don't do this *normally at home*'; cf. Garrick, 2005). Of course, the spatial concealment of sex is evident in the web, because online spaces apparently make hidden identities and secret experiences widely possible (Sanders et al., 2018).

In parallel to concealment, shameful sexualised spaces are often *displaced*. Focusing on guilt and shame yields meaningful perspectives on spatial repression. Consider, for example, the cases described by Papayanis (2000), on the use of laws in order to zone out pornography in New York, or by Hubbard (2004), on zero tolerance policies to displace sex workers in the central areas of Paris and London. Such phenomena have been commonly analysed in the urban studies literature in relation to mechanisms of revanchism, which may be framed in terms of a psychological projection of shame onto other subjects ('it's a shame to have prostitutes in the street. The neighbourhood has to be *cleaned*'). But it is also possible to conceive other rationales. For example, it is possible to hypothesise that the removal of shaming subjects may operate as a spatial strategy for repression and negation in order to limit the senses of guilt and shame connected with libidinal drives. The senses of guilt and shame may be painful for subjects

unable to recognise and accept the libidinal forces generated by the encounter with prostitutes and other sex workers, resulting in the desire, or the need, to remove them from geographical space. In this sense, the superego may be understood as the 'policeman' cleansing neighbourhoods from the guilty and shameful presence of sex workers.

Third, and not necessarily in opposition to displacement, there is the strategy of *isolating* (and hence, implicitly controlling and restricting) spaces for sexual practices which may be shamed by ordinary 'outside' people, as in the cases of gaybourhoods or red-light districts (Sibalis, 2004; Ghaziani, 2015). There are a number of different explanations beyond the clustering and separation of sexual minorities, including issues of safety, homonormativity and political visibility, which will not be reviewed here (see for example Ghaziani, 2015). Focusing on shame and guilt furnishes a further potential explanation, i.e. the power of conformity in limiting the senses of guilt and shame. Within the gaybourhood or the red-light district, certain minoritarian forms of sexuality become the norm. Hence, being for example a gay person within a gaybourhood does not imply violation of a 'norm' (or 'normality'), so that social shaming (which is, of course, only one among the many possible sources of guilt and shame) is somehow removed. With this perspective in mind, to be stressed is that isolated spaces are not at all concealed or invisible; on the contrary, they may be very visible, as in the case of touristified red-light districts. Cattani and Vanolo (2014) employ the metaphor of the island in order to describe separate spaces which are consumed and performed by sexual minorities on different scales. They focus on the gay club: the apparent separation from the 'mainland' in the club/island seems to frame different realities, possibilities, expectations, intimacies and emotional fields. As described in their paper, the collective and social construction of the crowd (the 'we' in the gay club/island: 'look at how many of *us* are here tonight') triggers emotions which may obliterate shame, despite the limits and the evident forms of exclusion which can be embedded in the gay recreational scene. Similar considerations apply to the case of red-light districts. Using Amsterdam as a case study, Chapuis (2017) emphasises the crucial role of looks and gazes in shaping the variegated moral and emotional landscape at the basis of the consumption and representation of the spectacle of commodified sex in the bounded space of the red-light district. In both cases, being together with other sex consumers (either in the form of 'real' sex consumption or 'imagined' through tourist practices) limits guilt and shame through the mechanisms of conformity and normalisation.

Finally, it is possible to conceive defensive mechanisms which have to do with *mimesis*, the process whereby 'shamed' sexual objects are reframed as 'normalised' ones. The case of sex toys is paradigmatic. In the past, sex toys were commonly imagined as 'forbidden' objects to be furtively bought in sex shops, often located in concealed spaces or separated islands (once again, red-light districts), in an emotional field clearly connoted by shame and masculinity (cf. Fahs and Swank, 2013). Today sex toys have been largely normalised because they can be easily found in pharmacies and even in tourist stores: on the one hand, they have been partly liberated from many taboos; on the other, it is possible to suggest that they have been camouflaged and remoralised as 'healthy' products (for example lubricants, vibration rings, etc.) and/or as 'jokes' ('funny, that dildo looks like a bunny') in order to decentre and repress guilt and shame. By normalising their presence in everyday spaces, including their presence in shop windows and advertisements, it has been possible to displace guilt and shame, and open new possibilities for consumption, including the socially acceptable and shame-free inclusion of feminine consumption. In their analysis of England and Wales, Crewe and Martin (2017) comment on the

changing urban geographies of the sex retail industry from spatially marginalised male-orientated sex shops to the emergence of female-orientated and femalefriendly 'erotic boutiques' located visibly in city centres, with meaningful consequences in terms of acceptability and visibility – and, for the arguments of this paper, guilt and shame (for similar perspectives on British cities, see also Hubbard, 2017). Similar considerations may be also applied to the sphere of porn, since the porn industry, porn culture and global porn brands are clearly acquiring wider social acceptance and visibility in space. This is testified for example by the diffusion of unashamed *Pornhub* t-shirts among young people, by the proliferation of debates on pornography in social sciences (as in the international journal *Porn Studies*), or by the emergence of forms of political activism connected to pornography (for a critical account on the normalisation of pornography in Western societies, see Dines, 2010).

#### **IV Concluding remarks**

This article has discussed the significance of guilt and shame, and more specifically the mechanisms for defence against guilt and shame, in the production of space. The argument has been grounded in the field of psychoanalytical geographies because it widely mobilises the understandings of shame and guilt developed by Freudian and post-Freudian scholars and by authors inspired by psychoanalytical analyses of the mechanics of the mind. The purpose has been to explore how space is contingent in psychic processes, and how the generation and negotiation of feelings of guilt and shame develop in the interplay between the 'inside' and the 'outside'. Put differently, the article is based on the assumption that conscious and unconscious processes unfold in geographical spaces involving both the internal processes of the mind, and the external spaces of the outside (cf. Kingsbury and Pile, 2014). The article has therefore propounded a series of hypotheses concerning distance, proximity, visibility and spatial strategies of concealment, mimesis, and displacement. Particularly, these hypotheses have been explored and exemplified by mobilising theoretical speculations and fictional everyday anecdotes concerning commodity consumption and sex. Other thematic fields may yield significant insights: for example, transport (exploring the several ways we deal with guilt, as evident in the case of the 'flight shame' movement<sup>2</sup>), tourism ('is it really possible to conceive of skiing as a sustainable sport?'; see debates on *staycation*: De Bloom et al., 2017) or, more recently, the mechanisms for containment of the Covid-19 pandemic (inducing the shaming of people who go out from home without meaningful, justified needs).

The two thematic areas proposed in this paper have been explored by proposing generalisations and ideal-typical arguments, and by mobilising urban studies literature in the field. Well-known spatial phenomena concerning commodity consumption and sex – such as the concealment of the negative outcomes of consumption, or the clustering of sexually diverse subjects in gaybourhoods – have been mobilised and re-interpreted in light of psychoanalytical understandings of guilt and shame. Certainly, a potential direction to follow in order to develop better understandings of the spatialities of guilt and shame is to engage in meaningful empirical investigation. Such analysis will probably reveal the extent to which the spatial experiences related to guilt and shame are diverse, variegated and situated. Nevertheless, it should be borne

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<sup>2</sup> See J. Timperley's article on BBC Future, 10 September 2019; <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190909-why-flight-shame-is-making-people-swap-planes-fortrains> (accessed 1 January 2020).

in mind that meaningful empirical investigations are difficult to conduct, given the intimate and partly unconscious nature of guilt and shame. Post-representational approaches may certainly be of help, and clearly the examples and arguments proposed in this paper echo personal, autobiographical experiences, partly developed through personal encounters with psychoanalysis (Vanolo, 2014).

Developing a stronger understanding of the spatialities of guilt and shame – which also means opening up a debate on the geographies of these feelings – may serve multiple purposes.

First, it allows acknowledgement that guilt and shame assume meaningful roles in the mechanics of the production of space – roles which have been largely overlooked in human geography and urban studies. On adopting a Freudian perspective, it can be argued that several phenomena considered in this paper, in the spheres of commodity consumption and sex, are *over-determined* (cf. Kingsbury and Pile, 2014), that is, caused by more than one process. In this sense, what is suggested here is that the spatialities of consumption and sex are also determined by the mechanisms of guilt and shame, and exploring such mechanisms can yield novel sets of explanations for various geographical phenomena.

Secondly, well-crafted investigations into the geographies of guilt are likely to furnish new materials for psychoanalytical debate. Space is largely absent in the psychoanalytic literature, and the possibilities of positive cross-fertilisation between geography and psychoanalysis should not be underestimated. This perspective is not new, as psychoanalytic geographies are now a consolidated area of research, but little has been written specifically on guilt and shame, and hence this area of reflection and investigation has yet to be fully explored.

Finally, there is clearly a political and transformative potential in acknowledging the spatial mechanics of guilt and shame. First, as discussed in the paper, the psychoanalytic literature has stressed the substantial but often invisible linkages connecting guilt with feelings such as revenge or forgiveness. Secondly, as emphasised by scholars such as Probyn (2005), shame has a political role in shaping collective identities, in developing consciousness about who we are, and in sustaining progressive thinking. But it can be argued that many political movements and forces, for example environmentalism or veganism, are largely driven by guilt and shame, or that they deliberately mobilise guilt and shame in order to convince and expand their basis. Of course, guilt and shame are not the only forces at work, nor the main ones, and not for everybody. Nevertheless, it is likely that they play a significant political role (for a wide-ranging analysis of vegan positionalities, stressing the pivotal role played by the sense of guilt, see Greenebaum, 2012; on guilt and ecological movements, see Morton, 2018). Accordingly, reflections on the politics of guilt raise very practical and relevant questions with clear geographical implications. How long will people keep on sorting waste, if guilt or shame is the only reason, at least for certain subjects? Is it possible that feeling guilty triggers conservative spatial politics, as feeling bad about inequalities, injustice and global problems makes us feel good and empathetic? Is it naive to imagine progressive, transformative spatial politics which are genuinely guilt-free?



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