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Eroticism *in* and *of* the City: The Question of Approach

ABSTRACT

Discussions of eroticism usually commence with references to Georges Bataille and his *L'Érotisme*, whose first English edition was published under the title *Death and Sensuality: A Study of Eroticism and the Taboo* (1962), thus encouraging analyses in terms of transgression. This article opens with a quotation from Zygmunt Bauman's essay, "On Postmodern Uses of Sex," which reflects on the instability of the concept and emphasizes its contextualization. This openly declared incongruity raises questions of applicability. What is meant by *eroticism* today, i.e. in and after postmodernism? The article seeks to explore the relevance of the term in studies of urban drama and tries to suggest a workable approach that would differentiate between the commonly observable erotic material found on display within the premises of the city and the eroticism of the city itself. In the latter case the erotic relationship involves the materiality of the urban context and its user. The essay, focusing on drama, assumes that plays are written for the stage—their proper mode of existence—and deems it necessary to include the city/theatre and city/drama interdependence as well as the nexus of concepts such as urban drama and its genre restrictions into the following analysis.

ABSTRACT

“Eroticism . . . has become a sort of a Jack of all trades. . . . This circumstance makes it available for new kinds of social uses.”
(Bauman 27)

INTRODUCTION

The following article seeks to explore the ways eroticism can be conceived and imagined in the context of cityness and urban drama in order to, further on, formulate a feasible approach for a prospective analysis. Looking for answers to questions generated within the broad scope of a rather complex subject requires that the pervasive synergy of terms and ideas the discussion involves be clarified, even though, at first sight, the individual concepts may seem traditionally obvious and transparent. Such a search includes a clarification of the concept of urban drama, which appears in the title of the essay, an elucidation of the relation between urban drama/theatre and the city and, finally, a differentiation between eroticism *in* and eroticism *of* the city. Whereas the former poses the urban milieu as merely a container or a backdrop, both providing space for various forms of erotic activity, the latter recognizes the actively dynamic part of the city in an erotically charged relationship.

Although, with a few exceptions, the term “urban drama” is used more frequently in reference to the broad spectrum of city-oriented dramatic productions which enter the stage in the late sixteenth-century, my intention has been to look for an approach that allows us to focus also on more recent developments. Still, the subject being both old and new, a recognition of the indebtedness of contemporary urban drama to tradition as well as the acknowledgement of some explicit connections between contemporary and past projects may be helpful in bringing to light more than just the past, historical context of the antecedents. Whatever the changes, it seems impossible to deal with the subject of urban drama and eroticism without referring to its significant sources that the present day plays are variously immersed in by their quoting, evoking intertextually, adapting or violently appropriating. For example, in *Serious Money* (1987), subtitled “City Comedy”—a play recording the virtual reality of financial market operations under Margaret Thatcher—Caryl Churchill quotes in the introduction a scene taken directly from a 1692 play by Thomas Shadwell, a traditional Restoration comedy entitled *The Volunteers, or The Stockjobbers* (Churchill 196–97), in which the characters speculate on patents. In the course of discussions with Stafford-Clark, Churchill decides to “move the extract from *The Stockjobbers* to the start, where it bec[omes] a kind of prologue” (Roberts 145). The contemporary

play develops creatively formal and thematic analogies between the two worlds driven by the adrenalin and excitement produced by the stockjobbers, brokers and shareholders whose world is turned by the penny and whose heart inhabits the city, that is the stock exchange. In this entrepreneurial world of the 1980s, British theatre became synonymous with the achievement of Lloyd Webber and the producer Cameron Mackintosh. They provided, sometimes in tandem, *Cats* (1981), *Les Misérables* (1985) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1986), thus turning London into the Western world's leading song-and-dance factory. These made vast fortunes for their creators; greeted visitors, in poster form, at Heathrow; and had a profound effect on British theatrical culture. By adapting both the Restoration satirical material and the contemporary musical rhythms, Churchill bridges temporally distant realities and proves the validity of the early city comedy simply by revealing the grounds of its revival. Tanika Gupta, looking back to the Restoration theatre, writes an actualizing adaptation of William Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, originally set in London in 1675. Instead of the country "ignoramus" invading London, the contemporary 2004 version concentrates on a multicultural, prevaillingly Indian milieu entering and spreading all over the same city. So now it is not the country but the colonies that enter the metropolis, becoming indicative, like Churchill's *Serious Money*, of a prominent shift experienced by London inhabitants. Contemporary adaptations of cityness no longer involve a particular urban organism but embrace the global urbanity and economy instead.

URBAN DRAMA? THEATRE AND THE CITY: MATERIALITY, DRAMATIC TEXT AND PERFORMANCE

The synergy of theatre and urbanity can be discussed simply in terms of location where theatre, according to Marvin Carlson, has been perceived as a prevaillingly urban institution also in the Middle Ages (17ff). This becomes more tangible later on, with theatre houses moving, in the course of time, from the outskirts of the city and the other bank of the River Thames towards the centre. The city constitutes a social, political and cultural context, a milieu within which the theatre functions and thus affects its ultimate meaning. Jen Harvie reflects on how cultural materialism indicates the complicity of "Western urban theatre" with neoliberal capitalism and how this interdependence both limits theatrical creativity (25) and provides a comment on what appears on the stage. He refers to ideological priorities reinforced by the contemporary Barbican, whose social/cultural function has been ironically affected by the gentrification of its environment. The same applies to the commercialization of the Royal Court and

its effects bitterly commented upon by Max Stafford-Clark, who reveals details of the intricate policy in the context of staging *Serious Money* and “axing” Jim Allen’s *Perdition* (Roberts 31). Thus, both in the earlier and in the contemporary context, theatre is immersed in the political, economic and material milieu of the conceived city and in its practice. This materiality affects and often limits the staging of dramatic texts, although the relation is to be seen as reciprocal.

Understanding the city in connection with the stage demands recognition of its materiality, on the one hand, and of its conceptually mediated appearance in the dramatic texts, on the other. The latter involves a whole spectrum of cultural media ranging from the static order-oriented concepts which focus on grasping what may be called the body of the city and constructing a picture, for example symbolic or metaphorical, to those accepting the resistant fluidity of shapeless cityness without maps where the dynamic urbanity cannot be easily contained—either textually or visually. Notwithstanding conceptual dissolution, the city may become “tangible” as often emotionally charged individual experience unrelated to complex, static, geographical, architectural or social structures and images.¹ Theatre may encourage its urban audience to participate directly in performative interventions, in site-specific walks or rides staged by urban artists, inspiring and facilitating a discovery of a seemingly familiar city. Site specific performance and theatre require separate treatment. Even though the primary interest of the present essay is limited to dramatic texts, an awareness of urban materiality and the assumption of its presence in the dramatic text remains ineradicable and, ultimately, significant for the appreciation of such urban plays as Gary Owen’s *Ghost City* (2004), Ed Thomas’s *Stone City Blue* (2004), *Cityscape* by Emily Steel et al. (2010), Mike Bartlett’s *Earthquakes in London* (2010) or Stephen Poliakoff’s *My City* (2011). According to Julian Wolfreys, the city appears to be a dynamically self-transforming battleground which “takes place” in response to the materiality of the urban by the materiality of language (5). In the theatre, which Wolfreys excludes from his discussion, the materiality of its complex language is even more prominent. The city, says Ben Highmore in *Cityscapes*, is “produced” and “lived” imaginatively (6). The approach assumed by the more recent studies emphasizes the importance of “materiality” as well as the fact that the city is written or produced rather than represented.

¹ David Harvey in *The Urban Experience* (1989) and, more extensively, Richard Lehan, in *The City in Literature* (1989), recall the various frames, such as the *Joycity* or the *City of Limits*, which encourage one to think about “images” of urbanity.

URBAN DRAMA AS A SUB-GENRE: LIMITATIONS OF A GENRE-ORIENTED APPROACH

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Apart from its reciprocal engagement in the materiality of the city context, “urban drama” can be treated as a subgenre or as a development of an earlier generic form, the comedy—and thus discussed in terms of genre criteria and conventions. An analysis along these lines, however, entails certain restrictions. Thus, earlier studies, for instance *Jacobean City Comedy* (1968) by Brian Gibbons, which follow the genre-oriented line of argument, seem to have been interested less in the materiality of the city and more in approaching the early modern dramatic texts in terms of their adherence to literary convention. Gibbons applauds the mere fact that Jacobean playwrights forged out a new form of “City Comedy.” The mood of the plays was notably hostile to the earlier tradition of non-satiric, popular, often sentimental London comedies such as Thomas Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1). The scholar juxtaposes the two, vaguely indicating the inferiority of the amorphous and generically hybrid predecessor (Gibbons 1). Further on, disregarding the highly restrictive and selective genre of satire, Gibbons explains that Jonson has been so admired for his, what some believed to have been, true accounts of Jacobean life that, it has been even suggested, they should be taken as reliable documentary evidence of the actual historical situation (16). This conviction is scrutinized in later studies. Arguing in favour of generic templates, Gibbons seems to realize that satirical selectivity differs from an “objective or sociological scientific method” (16) or the realism of Henry Mayhew (3). Still, the impression that the rendering is accurate enough for the author prevails even though what is meant by “historical situation” boils down, mainly, to a catalogue of familiar vices. Yet, according to Gibbons, the materiality of the urban, the play’s setting in the city of London, is “accurately achieved with many placing references to street and district names” (9). The same applies to the accurately rendered jargon. However, even according to Gibbons, both are reproduced to attract local interest. Accuracy, then, is a matter of some realism or accurate representation that, in itself, is more attractive than abstraction or straightforward allegorization.

In spite of this correctness, the city with its inherent heterogeneity is squeezed into genre conventions. Gibbons defines the “City Comedy” genre distinguishing two essential criteria. First, all the plays are satires providing a survey of folly and vice. The chief villain symbolizing ruthless materialism, aspiration and anarchy is the usurer. Second, they make use of urban setting completed with proper characters and incidents and exclude “material appropriate to romance, fairy tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle” (11). The dramatists of the Jacobean Age, Gibbons hopes to

show, “articulated a radical critique of their age” (4), which implies that they diagnosed a state of social or political crisis and stigmatized its roots. “City Comedy,” thus defined, represents the city as the legible setting for concerns related, for example, to the shift toward commodity capitalism and individualism. Under these circumstances, urban space itself remains deceptively transparent and thus beyond interrogation or mystery. This conclusion is corroborated by Ian Munro in his study of the crowd in early modern London. Munro suggests that the genre of city comedy avoids the emblem of the crowd—its multiple, infectious and grotesque body—focusing on a small repertoire of urban characters and situations conveying the city through synecdoche, not metonymy (48). This decision assumes a utopian construct and a panoptic scopic regime as a background concept. Focusing on character, on “city types,” and defining the city as its people, Leinwand observes that discussions of the connection between the city and city comedy may resort either to abstractions or to social roles (19–20). Genre-oriented discourse is capable of revealing in relatively abstract terms eroticism *in* the urban context by showing relations among its inhabitants as literary types but precludes discussions reaching out beyond the text.

THE RHETORIC OF SOCIO-SPATIAL DRAMA: THE “SPATIAL TURN”

More recent studies of urbanity in literature, including those of drama and theatre, conduct their research in terms of socio-spatial rhetoric. Rather than genre conventions, they study the imbrications of sociality and spatiality in text and performance. Referring to and re-reading Michel Foucault’s *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (2003/1966) and “Of Other Spaces” (1986), Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1988), Edward W. Soja’s *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) and *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (2000), they posit a particular synergy between the stage and the city. Jean E. Howard in *Theatre of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598–1642* (2007), recognizing the significantly changing function of specific places in the city of London in the first half of the seventeenth century and the synergy of theatre and city, organizes his discussion in accordance with the specificity—but also ambiguity—of urban locations including the Royal Exchange, Debtors’ Prisons, Bawdy Houses, Ballrooms and Academies in West End London. As a result of this “spatial turn,” the significance of purely generic categories is reduced. The author emphasizes their provisional rather than ontological utility (20) and finds the satiric approach to cityness in City comedy restrictive in its special attention paid to “attractive” details of setting on the one hand and typical occupations and fashion

as well as the vice/virtue dichotomy on the other (19). Thus Howard includes into the scope of her study what Gibbons carefully excludes: London comedy, chronicle comedies and London town comedies with their references to history, romance and the exotic. The scope of the book includes various “relational” sub-genres, such as London comedy where the subject-matter is urban life and negotiation of the presence of non-native inhabitants and commodities (for instance, William Haughton’s *Englishman for My Money*, 1598), chronicle London comedies (Dekker, *The Shoemaker’s Comedy*, 1599; *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, Part II*, 1606), and London town comedies focusing on places of urban leisure in the West End, where characters practise assuming erotic postures (William Cavendish, *The Variety*, 1649). The socio-spatial approach shifts the focus of study (among other things) from accurately represented fixed locations to *attitudes* towards change. Change means a general sense of mobility, the clash between the xenophobic and the cosmopolitan within the increasingly miscegenational space of the city where newcomers need guidance, transformations of economic and commercial conditions rendering the city a placeless market transgressing the historically recent but already traditional boundaries of the Royal Exchange.

Commenting on contemporary events in theatre, J. Chris Westgate believes that “what is written for the theatre, regardless of where or how it will be staged, is often intricately linked with conditions of urbanism” (1). He modifies the opening statement, admitting that it applies to times of transition and transformation in particular. Thus *Urban Drama: The Metropolis in Contemporary North American Plays* focuses on events staging various symptoms of such a transformative crisis reflected in the number of the homeless, in riot rates as well as in the gentrification of the 1980s and 1990s. Like in Howard’s study of early modern comedy, the variety of multicultural backgrounds, perspectives and voices in contemporary drama becomes equally prominent here. Among the new voices are those of the immigrants as opposed to those of the native citizens, the voices of the hitherto often silent female, the outsider or the other as well as the voice of the private that surface in a city of *dissocia*. The shift from genre studies, which adapt the geographical locale of the city for settings, to studies understanding the city as a category of thought and experience, makes clear that, as Stanton B. Garner observes, theatre is but a mode of urban experience (97).

EROTICISM

Re-opening a discussion on eroticism in philosophy and art, Paul Gregory (1988), like Alyce Mahon (2007) twenty years later and more openly,

refers to the views expressed by Georges Bataille (1957)² and paraphrases his views speaking of eroticism as the “quality of human sexuality in virtue of which it acquires a meaning that goes beyond and is separate from the pleasure or the procreative function of the sexual act” (Gregory 339). Both the philosophical and the aesthetic debate commence with and converge on the nexus of sexuality and eroticism. Later, in the discussion on art, Mahon puts emphasis on the varied and more multifaceted eroticism as transgression of taboos, aesthetic challenge through the acceptance of low culture (Mahon 16–17) or, in the philosophical texts, loss of sovereignty by the subject (Gregory 342). This expanding approach may lead in various directions, and thus Peter Michelson, writing on the triad of eroticism, taboo and transgression, defines them as key terms mediating between “social rationality” and “natural violence” (144). When referred to the urban as body, the formulation that opens the present discussion—juxtaposing sexuality and eroticism—may apply as a metaphor pertaining to the logic grounded in perspective-oriented ocularcentrism. There, space admits a fixed observer and a stable (immobile) field of vision, especially in a naturally inclusive study of eroticism *in* the city. Eroticism of the city, on the other hand, requires further explanation.

EROTICISM AS MEETING THE OTHER

In the light of this need of further exploration of what eroticism *of* the city consists in, Marcel Duchamp’s perceptive observations seem to be useful. The artist and theoretician of the *avant-garde* reveals his views on eroticism rendering the concept more applicable to urbanity. In an interview with Pierre Cabanne, Duchamp, when asked what personal definition of eroticism he would give, answers as follows:

I don’t give a personal definition but basically it’s really a way to try to *bring out in daylight things that are constantly hidden*—and they are not necessarily erotic—because of the Catholic religion, because of social rules. To be able to *reveal* them, and to place them at everyone’s disposal . . . it’s the basis of everything. “Eroticism” was a theme, even an “ism,” which was the basis of everything I was doing at the time of the “Large Glass.” (Cabanne 88)

Thus Duchamp sees eroticism in the act of revealing the hidden rather than as a quality inherent in an object. Analogously, in his “Semiology of the Urban,” published much later and never referring to Duchamp, Roland

² Gregory explains that his inspiration comes from Georges Bataille, especially from *L’Eroticisme*, 1957 (*Eroticism*).

Barthes writes on a dimension of the city he decides to call eroticism. He is at the same time certain of the fact that it is an idea he has “never seen cited, at least explicitly, in the studies and surveys of urban planning” (170). Barthes’s idea of urban eroticism, assuming a mobile perceptual field, states that city is a writing and “[h]e who moves about the city, e.g. the user of the city . . . is a kind of reader who appropriates fragments of the utterance to actualize them in secret.” They, i.e. the fragments, are “chains of metaphors whose signified is always retracting or becoming itself a signifier” (170). Barthes recognizes a close correlation between his proposition and the mechanism currently investigated by Jacques Lacan. Though there is no explicit reference to Lacan in Barthes, he seems to evoke the analysis of desire. “The eroticism of the city,” Barthes says, “is the lesson we can draw from the infinitely metaphorical nature of urban discourse” (165). Eroticism, Barthes explains, is a “functional” and not a “semantic” concept. Therefore he uses “eroticism” and “sociality” (in the sense of a readiness to create a community) interchangeably, adding further on that “[t]he city, essentially and semantically, is the place of *our meeting with the other*” (171).

Both Duchamp and Barthes associate their much broader concept of eroticism with a discovery of the “hidden” or “secret,” either in the visual or in the verbal, a discovery which amounts to “an encounter with the other.” Similarly, Gregory notes that eroticism in individual relations means seeing through the eyes of the other and that “in . . . authentic encounter we are drawn intermittently into the perspective of the other” so that “our perspective is thrown in disarray” (340). The political philosopher, Iris Marion Young, has also picked up Barthes’s notion of eroticism as a qualifying marker of city life (239). She gives a new twist to this concept by bringing it together with the idea of pleasure caused by the experience of social difference on the one hand and by aesthetic surprise on the other. Young says that erotic attraction derives from a strong sense of “commonality” shared by a political community. Whether Young’s “commonality” is related to Barthes’s “sociality” is not clear. In the ideal of community, the sociologist claims, people feel affirmed because those with whom they share experiences, perceptions, and goals recognize and are recognized by them: one sees oneself reflected in the others. Heinz Paetzold, in his comment on Young’s proposition, is more sceptical, suggesting that “the idea of commonality . . . basically may have applied to smaller Republican communities of early modernity, say, a city like Geneva. It no longer fits with the scale of the modern big city that has become a city of strangers” (43). In the metropolis, argues Young, stressing the importance of pleasure, erotic pleasure consists “in being drawn out of oneself to understand that there are other meanings, practices, perspectives on the city, and that

one could learn and experience something more and different by interacting with them” (240). Young’s understanding of commonality, then, is closer to a plea for participation as interaction rather than to a concept of a traditional, stable community.

Instead of a bird’s eye view surveying the topography—like in a *Skeleton Ordnance Survey* of a city or a map of dirt, poverty and criminality classified, for example by Engels, in accordance with a colonial imaginary—the erotic view is not an expression of some a priori autonomous essence or theoretical assumption but seems to follow what Maurice Merleau-Ponty says in his *Phenomenology*:

The fact is that . . . my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body. . . . It is, therefore, quite true that any perception of a thing, a shape or a size as real, any perceptual constancy refers back to the positing of a world and of a system of experience in which my body is inescapably linked with phenomena. But the system of experience is not arrayed before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator, I am *involved*, and it is my involvement in a point of view which makes possible both the finiteness of my perception and its opening out upon the complete world as a horizon of every perception. (354–55)

Analogously, Steve Pile reflects on the experience of the city where the body of the viewer and the city become “intensifying grids” for social and psychic meaning produced in “the mobile, conflictual fusion of power, desire and disgust” (177). City eroticism is in the promiscuity which carries the danger of infection but generates a continually appropriated text and a spectacle the walker—whether they be a *flâneur* or a *dérive* remains debatable—discovers and experiences as fascinating and delightful. The underground, the dark continent or the de-regulated or unruly city are penetrated by the often regulated body of the walker. Whether covertly following Barthes and Bataille or not, Steve Pile refers to city walking as narration stimulated by intersections of eroticism and knowledge (225). Bataille explains this interaction in “Beyond Seriousness,” stating that

[e]roticism is the substitution of the instant or of the unknown for what we thought we knew. We don’t know the erotic, we only recognize this passage from the known to the unknown in it; this passage raises us beyond our abilities, inasmuch as it is true that man aspires toward *what does not happen* from the beginning! (217)

DIVERSITY/SOCIALITY-COMMONALITY/EROTIC SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Inherent in Barthes's concept of "urban eroticism" are "diversity," "sociality" and "social activity" that he would call "almost erotic . . . in the broad sense of the word" (171). Young, as an urban philosopher who follows Barthes, and also Gerald E. Frug, identify these qualities as normative values indicative of ideal city life (Frug 117). Ideal, here, does not mean utopian. Joyful diversity is thus stimulated by people watching the "architectural and commercial variety" (Frug 117), by the very multiplicity of groups including the ethnic, gay, lesbian, religious, etc. as well as by the activity of neighbourhoods producing a sense of place in a promotion of intermingling. Eroticism stresses the pleasure and excitement which results from a surprising stimulation. In agreement with what Mumford states in his now classical study (*The City in History*, 1961), we can argue that the city's theatricality that comes to the fore in Barthes's proposition, generates "eroticism."

Apart from diversity, for Barthes, urban eroticism can be identified with the earlier mentioned "sociality" of urban life, a quality which implies that the city brings together and integrates³ people with completely different backgrounds and entirely different intentions. Variety belongs to its very structure. The city is a melting pot of rather divergent people,⁴ an idea some delight in as pleasurable while others consider a failure and a source of urban crisis (Westgate). Barthes locates "diversity," "sociality" and the broadly conceived "erotic activity" in the centre instituted by young people mainly—the centre being a "meeting place" and a space of subversive ludic forces where we/native inhabitants "ourselves are the other" (171), "inside out," and where the public may become private and the private may supplant the public. The centre, as opposed to residential periphery, is a place of "nourishment and purchase," "which are . . . really erotic activities in the consumer society" (Barthes 171). In Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, they are the cities of desire which, Ward writes, are "reorganised as sites of consumption, sites for the satisfaction of endless desire" (56)—sexual and economic—at times more important than identity. Stoppard provides a pertinent example in his film adaptation of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* where the two characters, increasingly overwhelmed by anxiety, try to "grasp" the legislation or grand narrative governing the reality they enter. Guil aptly comments on the fact that "the scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of FEAR" (13). Still, the outdated scientific approach employing classical

³ See: Henry Adam, *The People Next Door*; Stephen Bill, Anne Devlin and David Edgar, *Heartlanders*.

⁴ See: *England People Very Nice* by Richard Bean, *Testing the Echo* by David Edgar.

physics cannot contain the postmodern dissolution of eternity, nor can Guil's anxiety be tamed. Ros, who is slower (everything comes to stasis including his intellect) but therefore better prepared, is content due to the prospect of total immersion in consumption/nourishment symbolized by the giant, multilevel hamburger.

Diversity of encounters involves sense experience, where the specifically organized materiality of the city—via the experience of a *flâneur/dérive*/surrealist wanderer/female sphinx whose inside/outside location guarantees access to the erotic underground located not necessarily below street level—meets the materiality of language (language as event). The individual stroller constantly negotiates the private and the public so that the public is folded inwards and “brought forth as a private space of erotic experience” (Utell 11). Juan Carlos Ubillúz compares the early on declared non-productivity of a thus formulated eroticism—eroticism differentiated from the procreation-oriented sexuality—to Barthes's call for transgressive, nonrepresentational literature, for a writing that exceeds the mimetic (ideological). In addition, he recalls Barthes's ideal, the diversity promoting a “merry tower of Babel in which languages coexist in peace” (39) and which I would complement with the ideas of a floating (placeless) market, of the hyperreal, or of a capitalist *dissocia* Fredric Jameson refers to in *Postmodernism* and Anthony Neilson supplies with his vision of dissociative disorder⁵—that is a city where romance, the gothic and the ghostly can freely inhabit the impalpable materiality. This postmodern free-floating eroticism of all of these images, as Bauman also notes, torn from sexual reproduction and love, becomes an unattached signifier capable of “being wedded semiotically to virtually unlimited numbers of signifieds” (230). Gender is chosen and parental caress may have its erotic aspect.⁶ The unprecedented importance of the experience of *Jetztzeit* (*Erlebnis*), the encounter and its eroticization, may derive from what Bauman defines as the postmodern “deconstruction of immortality” cutting the present from both the past and the future (230).

Relieved from the obligation either to represent or to synecdochically indicate its particular source or the perfect city template, the erotic city emerges from the situationist, psychogeographical practice of encounters where, like in Ed Thomas's *Stone City Blue*, the character is a “hugger of streets” (9). The psychogeographical walker of the street-level resists the anonymity of the synecdochic, totalizing city where eroticism is contained within little theatres or other *loci* to re-establish what Marlin Coverley

⁵ Jameson deals with *dissocia* in the society (43, 337), while Neilson concentrates on subjectivity and the mental state, here the Multiple Personality Disorder.

⁶ See: Gary Owen's *Ghost City*, 2004.

defines as the emotional engagement with the surroundings.⁷ Erotic consumption of the city consists in its promise of the pleasurable or even the ecstatic in the process of experiencing it, i.e. in encounters with urban evolution, transformation, creativity and desire (Rewers 337). The brevity of these encounters and the expectation that they be enjoyed here and now is affected by the terror of eroticism in mass culture, in a pressure resulting in the domination of notoriety, recordings and happenings as opposed to fame, duration and art.

The city of Wrocław has an officially registered logo which it grants to events taking place in the city. The logo says “Wrocław the meeting place,” which epitomizes, I believe, a conscious marketing policy whose aim is to advertise the city as a city of encounters, of *Erlebnis*, a self-consciously erotic city. The city must be sexy! For the same purpose the city digs deliver material not so much for academic, historical investigation in search for truth as for creating “an atmosphere,” a pleasurable emotional psychogeographical relationship with the here and the now. Where materiality fails in its eroticism, narratives are produced: literary, scholarly and material. They include gothic, crime and fairy tales.

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⁷ Quoted from the electronic Kindle edition (1629).

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