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Urban encounters: juxtapositions of difference and the communicative interface of global cities

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URBAN ENCOUNTERS: JUXTAPOSITIONS OF DIFFERENCE AND THE COMMUNICATIVE INTERFACE OF GLOBAL CITIES

Abstract

This paper explores the communicative interface of global cities, especially as it is shaped in the juxtapositions of difference in culturally diverse urban neighbourhoods. These urban zones present powerful examples, where different groups live cheek by jowl, in close proximity and in intimate interaction – desired or unavoidable. In these urban locations, the need to manage difference is synonymous to making them liveable and one's own. In seeking (and sometimes finding) a location in the city and a location in the world, urban dwellers shape their communication practices as forms of everyday, mundane and bottom up tactics for the management of diversity. The paper looks at three particular areas where cultural diversity and urban communication practices come together into meaningful political and cultural relations for a sustainable cosmopolitan life: citizenship, imagination and identity.

Introduction

If we look at the city, rather than the state, it is because we have given up hope that the state might create a new image for the city (Derrida, [1997] 2006, p. 6).

The western global city is an intensely cosmopolitan location. Possibly more than any other location, the global city brings people, technologies, economic relations, and communication practices into unforeseen constellations and intense juxtapositions of difference (Benjamin, 1997) that contribute to the routing and rooting of the communicative city's interface. Especially in the urban neighbourhoods where people of different origins, cultural customs, and migrant histories live cheek by jowl, we can

observe appropriations of technologies and communication practices that relate to citizenship, imagination and belonging. Zones of the inner city or zones hugging uncomfortably the outer city give rise to neighbourhoods that are indispensable elements of the global city and, I would argue, crucial elements in defining its creative and communicative interface. The intense urban juxtapositions of difference in the unglamorous, and often marginalised and deprived, quarters of the global cities are usually invisible in tourist brochures, and even in relevant research. They are however locations, where the potential and power of communication to connect people in the locale and across boundaries, in shared attempts to seek citizenship, to find a location in the city and the world, and to shape identity in the global cosmopolis are revealed in intensity rarely observed elsewhere. These are also locations that reveal the limitations of communication -and of the communicative city itself- in solving problems of inequality, cultural and geographical divides and lack of representation within the nation. This paper addresses the interconnection between lived cultural diversity in the global city and its communicative interface in three distinct, though interconnected, sections; each section addresses one theme about this relation. The first theme is about citizenship and representation, and in particular, the formation of cultural citizenship in the city vis-à-vis the restrictive and excluding political citizenship of the nation. The second theme focuses on urban mediated imagination as a tool that individuals and groups use to locate themselves in the city and in the world. The third theme explores (cosmopolitan) identities and urban dwellers' attempt to root themselves in urban and transnational locations, often through appropriations of media and communications. Though this paper is not an empirical endeavour, it draws from empirical research conducted in the global cities of London and New York City

and in cosmopolitan European cities, such as Amsterdam and Athens; some empirical material are used to illustrate the paper's arguments.

What is particularly communicative about the global city?

Robins (2001) suggests that we should think through the city, instead of through the nation, because the city allows us to reflect on the cultural consequences of globalization from another than a national perspective. 'The nation, we may say, is a space of identification and identity, whilst the city is an existential and experimental space' (2001, p. 87). What Robins refers to as existential and experimental space is probably better captured by Walter Benjamin's discussion of unforeseen constellations and juxtapositions of difference in the city (1997). When it comes to the cosmopolitan city, we see skyscrapers, which house transnational corporations, next to humble and often impoverished multicultural neighbourhoods. Global cities, like London and New York, host some of the major media and communications corporations that control significant trends within global information production and distribution. At the same time, the city is not only in control of corporate and large scale innovation. If one looks beyond the corporate skyscrapers, the city appropriates a collection of communication technologies of various scales, kinds, legality and control. These include such variety as analogue pirate radio stations broadcasting out of council estate flats and state of the art productions on satellite and digital platforms. Thus -and as Benjamin challenges us to think- the city is not only an experimental space, but also a political space where struggles for power, control and ownership are reflected and shaped through the intense (mediated) meetings of people, technologies and places. While for the major global corporations located in the city's skyscrapers, control of media and communications is primarily driven by profit, for many urban

dwellers, attempts to control media and communications largely relates to access to knowledge, citizenship, identity and representation. The complicated -and even over-ambitious- appropriations of media and technologies in humble multicultural neighbourhoods reveal a plebeian cosmopolitanism that makes little impression to the corporate, political or tourist's gaze to a consumerist or elitist cosmopolitanism. However, this is a political, experimental and cultural cosmopolitanism that contributes to understanding why and how seeking (and sometimes finding) representation in global cities often takes place outside formal political and economic relations.

This plebeian cosmopolitanism includes informal economies, knowledge transfer and locally framed entertainment choices that shape systems of communication and creativity; these partly reproduce global cultures of consumerism and partly contest and re-appropriate them (for example, in pirate communication products exchange). It also reflects new forms of citizenship, which come with demands for representation on national and transnational domains, include unstable loyalties and have cultural, political and economic dimensions, all at the same time.

Urban communication without much glamour but with much significance
Extensive migration and travel, but also virtual everyday mediated travel and intense interconnections through appropriations of media and communications, are some of the major developments that destabilise the dominance of the nation as the political and cultural core of contemporary societies. Migration and travel are inherently linked to the establishment of global cities as major financial centres, interconnected among themselves and less connected to or dependent from the nation-state (Sassen, 2001). The economy of the global city attracts large numbers of migrants, who become key

actors for both city life and global economy (Eade, 2000; Massey, 2005; Sassen, 2001). Migrant and diasporic urban over-concentration, often in parallel to a decrease of the native population, transforms the city into a particular geographical location, where meetings are intense and often unpredictable. Groups of people -who, sometimes by need or by coincidence, come together in urban locations- do not only transform urban demography but also bring into urban life new desires and needs. Though origins, languages and cultures might vary, for the culturally diverse urban dwellers, a set of important needs and desires are shared: employment, housing, education, security, well-being and representation. In this context, across multicultural neighbourhoods we can observe similar sets of informal, face to face and mediated systems of communication. They serve as shared tools, but also as initiators of human interconnection, as distributors of information, and as mechanisms for sharing knowledge and building community infrastructure and sustainability. To the researcher and inhabitant of the culturally diverse locations of the city, local ethnic press, radio and television stations, community centres, multilingual internet cafés, graffiti and other forms of public communication of messages in multilingual boards and wall messages are familiar methods of communication that reflect the dual identity of each urban place as a particular location (hosting specific groups) and as a transnational location, being always connected, not only to *here*, but also to *some places elsewhere*.

Communication practices in the multicultural neighbourhoods of the city tend to be banal and ordinary, thus present little interest to studies on cosmopolitan creative and media industries. Such attention is attracted in the rare cases of urban musical success in the mainstream media scenes and in urban art's rare entries into museums and galleries. Attention to the communicative interface of the multicultural

neighbourhoods also comes when links between communication practices and extremism, terrorism and violence are come to light. However, attention fades away when it comes to the urban denizens' tactics of surviving the city, of making a city one's one, and of finding spaces of representation outside exclusive or excluding politics of national and commercial interests. The banal communication practices, involved in the establishment of urban dwellers' own media, in the use of digital technologies, and in the consumption of diverse media from the national and global mainstream, next to the urban and transnational 'alternative', expose processes of seeking a voice and citizenship outside the national political framework and reflect attempts to seek horizontal, deterritorialised and global connections (Eade, 2000).

The city of refuge

Next to the characteristics of the global city that derive from its recent intense economic, human and communication interconnections and which have shaped it as an intense global communication hub, another urban quality makes it an important location for understanding the close link between urban communication and cultural diversity. Derrida talks about the city of refuge ([1997] 2006), which has its origins in European, para-European and western traditions, such as the urban right to immunity, hospitality and sanctuary. The city of refuge invites reflection on the role of a cosmopolitics beyond the excluding politics of the nation. Derrida invites us to understand the city as both a celebrated location of difference but also as a location of duty and right to the politics of difference. The global cities are (or should be) cities of refuge. According to Derrida's definition, the cities of refuge are autonomous from each other and from the state, but they are also linked to each other, while they benefit from mediated interconnections to various global locations. One of the contributions

the cities of refuge are expected to make within cosmopolitics is the reorientation of the politics of the state so that rules of solidarity and hospitality can apply across cities and state sovereignty.

What is particularly relevant here about the tradition, experience and orientation of the cities of refuge, as discussed by Derrida, is the acknowledgement of cultural diversity as an inherent and political element of the city that makes it what it is. The (global) city cannot exist without its cultural diversity, its intense mediated interconnections within its territory and across the globe, and its politics that challenge national geographical authority and national and exclusive political citizenship. The city has gained its political and cultural significance because of these controversial characteristics, which also make it a desirable and exciting location, a location that people turn to in looking for hospitality, security and for making a home in a cosmopolitan world.

Cultural citizenship coming into life in the city

The cosmopolitan city hosts large numbers of people who have no or limited access to resources centrally controlled by the national and city authorities (e.g. employment, education, health). Usually, these are the same urban dwellers excluded or marginalised within the western nation-state's systems of political citizenship. For the vast majority of the western nation-states, political citizenship systems are based on territoriality and on one of the two methods of claiming citizenship (or a combination of the two). One can claim citizenship based on parenthood (the *ius sanguinis* system) or based on a system of restrictive residency (the *ius soli* system). '[*T]erritoriality* has become an anachronistic delimitation of material functions and cultural identities; yet, even in the face of the collapse of traditional concepts of sovereignty, monopoly over

territory is exercised through immigration and citizenship policies', argues Benhabib (2004: 5), explaining the tension between human and cultural transnationalism on the one hand, and state persistence on territorial boundedness on the other. This same model, which derives from Enlightenment ideals, privileges (and desires) unity against diversity and results to the inevitable incompatibility between citizenship rights and cosmopolitan urban dwellers' needs, desires and sense of (transnational) belonging.

Deriving from Enlightenment is also the separation between three different zones of citizenship: the political (the right to reside and vote); the economic (the right to work and prosper); and the cultural (the right to know and speak) (Miller, 2007). The third kind of citizenship is often undermined by an emphasis on the previous two, though it gains increasing importance among transnational communities, such as migrants and diasporas. Cultural citizenship addresses mechanisms of informal, cultural and communication practices of groups that seek representation in local, national and transnational spaces. Historically, formal political citizenship in nation-states has depended on rules of loyalty to the nation's ideology of politics (and often of religious and cultural dominant practices) and acceptance of a homogenous and singular cultural and political society. As a result, often minorities have turned to practices outside the formal political system in order to seek representation (including developing mechanisms of representation and/or information exchange in own media and in their locales). Pakulski writes that: 'claims for cultural citizenship involve not only tolerance of diverse identities but also -and increasingly- claims to dignified representation, normative accommodation, and active cultivation of these identities and their symbolic correlates' (cited in Flew, 2007, p. 77). Claims for cultural citizenship also entail claims on institutional level (e.g. anti-discrimination politics),

as well as recognition of media and other creative industries' production as forms of representation of diversity in contemporary culturally diverse democracies (Flew, 2007).

Nation-states' focus on a specific set of political rights and obligations (e.g. vote and loyalty to the state) defined by territoriality and exclusivity have failed to recognise (or welcome) the significance of migrant and diasporic hybridity and transnationalism as elements of a cosmopolitan citizenship. In this context, *the cultural* (diversity) has become an area of contestation rather than of recognition. Many western nation-states now see creativity and media production by groups characterised by intense transnationality as threats rather than as potentials for democratic representation. Nation-states' unease with cultural strategies for transnational recognition are expressed, for example, in the shift towards cohesion and integration policies vis-à-vis multicultural policies in countries such as Britain or The Netherlands. Next to the nation-state's scepticism -or even hostility in many cases- towards recognition of cultural citizenship, comes the celebration of a consumerist cultural citizenship by corporate ideologies. The corporate approach to cultural citizenship tends to strip it from its political significance and celebrates it as a synonym of the unprincipaled, classless, ageless and raceless consumer (Miller, 2007).

Outside -and often in contrast- to the national and corporate reactions to cultural citizenship, the city becomes a space where creativity and media production turn into cultural and political strategies for seeking recognition, especially among those excluded from other forms of representation in political and cultural life. As already argued, the city depends on intense juxtapositions of difference, connections and mobility beyond the restrictions of the nation-state. It thus creates spaces for 'new

citizenship rules based on mobile and transferable rights of personhood' (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p.94). Some of the tensions observed in the relations between the culturally diverse urban dwellers are the outcome of the conflict between cultural belonging in transnational worlds and the obligations to fulfil formal demands of exclusive regimes of citizenship. In acknowledging the limitations of the political (and nationally-defined) citizenship and its distinction from stronger variants of cultural citizenship, we need to locate the role of both communication and the city as frames, tools and agents in shaping cultural citizenship. Urban creativity becomes particularly interesting in this case. Often attached to the tactics of seeking representation outside the restrictive national framework, urban (mediated) cultural production includes creations on city walls, local radio stations, urban music and nightlife cultures. This creativity, whose origin is often not easy to track down, is the outcome of juxtapositions and meetings (not always without conflict) that take place in the city (and particularly the humble multicultural neighbourhoods).

Excluded from citizenship rights, education and Eurocentric and corporate cultures, migrants and members of diasporic groups (especially young people) often engage in such alternative forms of (mediated) expression and self-representation. Some of these creative practices are initiated as political acts of opposition to the state or to excluding politics of representation. For example, as graffiti, software piracy and radio piracy are illegal acts, the meanings of such practices are shaped in the context of illegality, opposition or rejection of the politics of the state. The cultural and social locations of such acts and the enactment of these practices by young, usually disenfranchised and minority youth, reflects -if not singularly, at least partly-processes of active opposition to state and corporate cultures that provide them no space for representation or respect. Such creative practices sometimes allow urban

dwellers to develop a common (plebeian) cosmopolitan language of communication in the locale and across global spaces. Especially media practices, such as music production and consumption and online broadcasting, might connect the local urban to the transnational global, while surpassing what might be an irrelevant and repressive national framework.

Finding a location in the world through urban imaginaries

No longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity), the imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labour and of culturally organised practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ('individuals') and globally defined fields of possibility' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 73-4).

The city is a location of difference and a host of 'media imaginings which activate and boost the imagination but also channel and limit it, precisely through the spread and utilization of the media in everyday life' (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 116). The cosmopolitan city takes a privileged position in global media culture, as it hosts large numbers of media and even larger numbers of media consumers. The growth of media and communication innovation in the city is widely recognised as a cultural and economic strength; the development of media and communications industries is celebrated by the authorities as an asset and as an indication of a powerful cosmopolitan culture. there is an element of this industry though, which tends to be less celebrated and less welcome -this is the area of media production (and consumption) by urban diasporic and migrant dwellers. Such production is extensive

and usually rooted in the same urban hubs as the major national and transnational commercial media. Even more so, these *other* media gain ground in terms of their consumption in those urban locations and among consumers who are also consumers of national and transnational mainstream media. The diversification of urban mediascapes is dealt with unease and concern by politicians and policy makers on local, national and transnational level as there are many misunderstandings about their role as mechanism for promoting imagined belonging and loyalties to distant *homelands*. Some local authorities in Austria, Britain, The Netherlands and elsewhere have gone as far as to ban the installation of satellite dishes, which aim at receiving transnational channels (Georgiou, 2003). The official or hidden reason for the ban is the state concern with the construction of competitive imagined communities through the media. While such top-down government initiatives are becoming more frequent, on the ground and especially in the multicultural neighbourhoods of the city, it is almost impossible to control the density of satellite dishes. In such neighbourhoods of Amsterdam, Athens, London and Paris, satellite dishes become a recognisable sign of transnationality and of an urban imaginary that expands its boundaries of symbolic connections across its streets and across transnational media highways.

Unlike the fears of authorities as regards the diversity of urban media production and consumption that gives rise to a threatening imagination locked into *another* exclusive and foreign public sphere, urban communication practices show that imagination increasingly moves away from exclusive national communities and rather reveals qualities of multiple and multipositioned imaginings (Aksoy and Robins, 2000; Georgiou, 2006). My unpublished recent study of urban young members of media audiences in London and Leeds has provided an up-to-date picture of the global mediated landscapes that users of transnational diasporic media construct.

Participants in this study who have access to the controversial transnational satellite channel Al Jazeera (English and/or Arabic language programme) have revealed in their words and practice the complex implications of having access and consuming transnational media. In the case of the Al Jazeera consumers asked, access to the specific medium has advanced critical engagement with all media and a deep appreciation of the potential to getting access to diverse sources of information, each with their own positive and negative characteristics. All participants watching Al Jazeera and other diasporic media products explain how they never just watch diasporic television but also mainstream national, local and transnational media. Thus, the diasporic medium does not become a carrier of an alternative exclusive imagined community but rather a comparative element for being part in imaginary global worlds. In the words of a 20-year-old participant:

> I watch Al Jazeera – they show everything on the spot. If there is a murder taking place in Iraq or something, it is there on TV and then it's exclusive. That's what I like about it. With BBC, they tend to cut out some violent scenes. Obviously because they are considered as not suitable.

When asked if he watches less of the mainstream national BBC now that he has access to Al Jazeera, he has no hesitation to declare: 'No, BBC is on the *normal* (i.e. terrestrial) channels. Al Jazeera is on digital, so if I find something interesting on it I'll watch it but usually I'll just watch BBC'. For another participant, Al Jazeera is a new source of information he discovered in an Arab friend's house. Though this person has no direct diasporic connections, he finds Al Jazeera a fascinating alternative to British media, which offers a different outlook to world affairs. These

two examples reveal two elements of diasporic media's role in shifting boundaries from national spaces of imagined belonging to transnational ones. In the first case, the diasporic medium provides a daily check to viewpoints presented in mainstream British and other western media. These examples also show that access to diverse media advances the critical outlook towards both the diasporic and the mainstream media. The urban dweller and global media consumer above is critical of what he sees as (self-)censorship in British media on the one hand and of the excessive violence on the programmes of Al Jazeera on the other. Availability of diverse media has become a constant mechanism for constructing an imagination that includes different worlds, or different elements of one world. Another dimension of urban imaginings revealed in these examples, is the way the culturally diverse city becomes a mediator of various symbolic worlds. Urban dwellers who are not diasporic subjects themselves sometimes gain entry to imagined worlds beyond those framed narrowly by national and western media because of their close proximity to people and media from different cultures. Transnational imagination becomes part of everyday life (Appadurai, 1996) and the possibility of moving -either physically or through mediation- between and across landscapes is neither a futuristic fantasy nor an issue exclusively relevant to members of a diaspora.

Cosmopolitan identities for a cosmopolitan world?

'How can the hosts and guests of cities of refuge be helped to recreate, through work and creative activity, a living and durable network in new places and occasionally in a new language?' Derrida ([1997] 2006: 12).

In the culturally diverse hubs of the city, the aesthetics and the conduct of everyday life in the street and in public domains such as libraries, pubs, *ethnic* grocery shops

and community centres, are constant reminders of the close proximity of difference and of the diversity that finds expression in public and private urban life. The purity and the privatised closure of the suburbia and of zones with little linguistic and cultural diversity are challenged in urban everyday life, which refuses to be enclosed in private and secluded domestic domains. Loud and contesting musical themes coming out of cars, multilingual signs on high streets, competing religious symbols in neighbouring places of worship, and exchanges of products, including music, film, and computer programmes, all reveal the multiplicity of possibilities for belonging *here* (and as a consequence *there* as well). The top-down ideologies that dominate the locations of the city representing the centres of power (e.g. around Parliament houses and tourist sights) promote a shared and common identity, resting upon similar aesthetics and practices that respect privacy, national liberal democracy and global consumer culture. But culturally diverse neighbourhoods challenge this national imagination on a daily basis. Urban pockets become spaces for performative identities, which take their shape around struggles for representation of various cultures, cacophonous aesthetics and diverse interpretations and practices of global popular culture, democracy, law and order (even in their direct violation). Such performative identities are often excluded from the mainstream media and the imaginary of national cohesion; they are often treated by the state with uncomfortable inability to understand or as potential threats to the ideology of the nation and western modernity.

Performative urban identities increasingly move away from the national imaginary and media and communications become experimental tools in this process. This does not mean that urban appropriations of media and technologies are always safe, democratic and dialogic. The cases when media are used as effective systems to

compete with and to contest other cultures, to spread political and religious propaganda and to undermine dialogical communication that takes place in the street exist next to emancipating and democratic media projects. What all projects have in common is that they reflect elements of a dissident cosmopolitanism outside exclusive national zones. Importantly, what we increasingly observe among the newest forms of urban media production, is a contestation of national frameworks of belonging, not only in relation to the country of settlement, but also in relation to the country of origin. Projects such as multicultural radio stations, urban art production and experimentations with technologies outside ethnically exclusive spaces reveal new forms of identities that have more to do with cosmopolitan life than with exclusive ethnic and national spheres of belonging. Some of those public locations, where we can observe a dissident cosmopolitanism and interethnic explorations of identities are the local internet cafés and telecommunication centres. These public spaces have grown to be distinctive cultural and communication hubs of multiculturalism, providing relatively cheap and easy access to diverse mediascapes and opening up possibilities for creative, locally grounded and dialogical experimentations with (mediated) belonging. My ethnographic observations in London have shown that many of these centres' users are not just customers and consumers of specific technologies, but also active participants in micro-communities of *techno-habitués* of the virtual and physical space developing around the café's life. These places become meeting points and pubic spaces where minorities, excluded from other formal and controlled public places, gather, socialise and shape elements of their identities as urban dwellers and (connected) global cosmopolitans.

Internet access in local cafés and communication centres mediates understanding among emergent communities of people who might not share an origin, but who share

common present interests, location and curiosity about close and distant (mediated) worlds. Diasporic and interethnic dialogue in these places becomes a natural ingredient of their function as communicative, multi-use spaces and thus reflects the emergence of new spaces for belonging in locales that are increasingly diverse and connected to the world through their human and technological capital. These locations become hubs for translating and speaking across local and transnational difference; these distinctly urban spaces (sometimes co-hosting internet cafés, telecommunication centres, grocery shops, hairdressers and beauticians) are reflecting the *dialogical imagination* of a cosmopolitan outlook, observed by Beck (2006). What Beck argues is that cosmopolitan outlook opens up a space of *dialogical imagination* in everyday life and forces us to develop the art of translation and bridge-building. Such locations impose -and sometimes force- the coexistence of difference while forming an exercise of 'boundary transcending imagination (Beck, 2006, p. 89).'

Communal media consumption can also advance a sense of community and commonality among internet cafés' users and others in far away places (who are though connected and accessible). Thus, physical co-presence, next to imagined presences (Urry, 2000), redefines spaces of belonging beyond national 'communities of sentiment and interpretation' (Gilroy, 1995: 17). Media 'images can connect local experiences with each other and hence provide powerful sources of hermeneutic interpretation to make sense of what would otherwise be disparate and apparently unconnected events and phenomena' (Urry, 2000, p. 180).

Urban systems of communication mediate cosmopolitan identities
Living in the city comes with the development of certain strategies and tactics for managing diversity and close contact with others (such as protection against crime;

development of micro-communities and networks of (trans-)local support; use of selective entertainment, communication and transport resources in the city). It also comes with informal systems of knowledge, often mediated, that develop in the sociality that comes with urban diversity. Interpersonal relations, as well as the mere close proximity of difference, relates to these strategies. As two interviewees participating in my recent research acknowledge, living in London provides them with unique cosmopolitan connections to the world:

> Definitely, I know more about places because I live in London. My friends…people here come from all over the place. You just automatically pick it up, it's not like you seek it to find it out. One of my friends is Muslim. I don't go out of my way to learn about Islam. It's just through when he speaks. I learn this way.

> There are loads of small minded people -especially in England and outside of London. London is very multicultural and diverse but outside of London people don't get to interact with other cultures like us here. So they just see what they know and become narrow-minded.

Urban mediated and face to face communication practices sustain -and even boost- cosmopolitan identities, possibly like in no other location. Cosmopolitan identities do not erase the importance of origin and particularity, but privilege and depend upon a diverse and inclusive universalism that contrasts nationally defined universalisms of exclusive commitment to one single community. This cosmopolitan and more inclusive universalism is often observed in people's words (as above), but also in

local media projects, such as in pirate and community radio. Such projects tend to combine a dual focus upon the particular and the universal, creating unique platforms for intercultural dialogue (even when, and as a rule, always, with their limitations). The case of Sound Radio (soundradio.org.uk) in the multicultural Hackney, London is a characteristic example. This community radio prides itself for being a 'positive voice from East London' and a multilingual, multicultural output of local voices. At the same time, it prides itself for having listeners across continents – which includes North and South America and Southeast Asian in particular (with the rest of the world also being represented among listeners). It broadcasts in 13 languages in an attempt to give voice to the local diverse communities of East London but also in order to advance links between the locality and the rest of the world. At the same time, local agendas predominate production, with education and crime being among the most reported topics, but also local musical and artistic creativity taking significant space in the coverage of local events. The case of Sound Radio presents one of those occasions where the identity of a medium becomes a political and cultural projection of a cosmopolitan identity for both the urban locale and its culturally diverse inhabitants. The cosmopolitan new places and the new languages of communication that Derrida ([1997] 2006) suggest that can (and should) emerge in the city of refuge are possibly not very different to the words of the two Londoners above or the production values and output projected by experimental communication initiatives, such as London's Sound Radio.

To conclude….

The communication practices discussed in this paper reflect urban denizens' attempts to find representation and to develop a dynamic politics of identity in a cosmopolitan

world. They represent the efforts of the diverse city's dwellers to fulfil their needs and to integrate the complexity of their spatial and cultural journeys into politics of representation. They also project their efforts to take representation and identification in their hands, by dismissing, resisting and contesting the restrictions and the rules posed by financial and political centres of power that control symbolic and material sources on national and transnational level. The development of communication activities are sometimes singularly crucial -and even desperate- acts for seeking citizenship in urban and national worlds, especially when political and cultural life in the national and global mainstream provides no entry point to those at the bottom of the social ladder and those who have no formal political rights. Communication and media practices do not only reflect possibilities for representation and identity construction, but they also reveal the limitations of access to tools that further citizenship and participation. Most of the communication activities discussed in the previous sections balance between three poles: the marginalised alternative creativity (e.g. the production and consumption of urban music, of diasporic and local media), the ephemeral (e.g. encounters around media consumption in the street and in public local spaces), and the illegal/semi-legal appropriations of media and communications (e.g. piracy, graffiti). This delicate balance invites further deliberation around the understanding of the overall potentials of cultural and political activity in the city as regards wider issues of representation and equality. This is a big challenge and the answers attempted here cannot but be incomplete. This paper's discussion on some of the possibilities for representation and identity emerging in urban communication, the reference to the reflections of urban dwellers on these potentials, and the emergence of communities through unpredictable appropriations of communication technologies,

hopefully contribute to the discussion on the communicative city's contribution to projects of participation and inclusion.

This discussion has only recently began and it demands further theoretical and empirical explorations, especially as regards the long-term political relevance of communication practices that take place in banal manners and in humble locations. What already emerges as an important point that needs further emphasis and articulation is the close interconnection between *the cultural* and *the political*. What this interconnection already indicates it that, even if limited or conditional, the role of the communicative city for identity, imagination and citizenship, can signify important conceptual and practical possibilities for understanding participation and representation in increasingly diverse, mediated and cosmopolitan worlds.

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