In-between Space: A Cinematic Counter Argument to a Supposed Annihilation

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INTRODUCTION

This line of investigation uses film -specifically, the representation of mass transit in films between 1945 and 1987— to provide an alternate lens for conceptualizations and transformations of public space. As such, its aim is not to be nostalgic, but to revisit -through this specific type of film — the role(s) of public *in-between space* which results from the presence of mass transit in various iconographic cities of America and Europe. The places depicted — their spaces and their activities — provide justifiable alternatives for public forums in *in-between space*. The footage used is mostly taken from pseudo documentary-style films which are mostly shot on location, and -with the exception of Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire*- use relatively unknown or amateur actors. As such, they consciously address realism. I use these films as visual *evidence* and thus contribute to the ongoing discussion on public space. Public space is not dead, as some critics would have us believe. I contend that any meaningful discussion about public space still addresses *center(s)*, *periphery(s)* and *in-between space*. These films and this line of investigation, begins to provide a conduit for this ongoing discussion.

We live in a global community which is increasingly inclusive, and if not so, at least we are made increasingly aware of the other. Our present means of communication have and are in the process of constant change -a process which is seemingly always progressively transforming, feeding upon its own technological leaps and bounds. How can this phenomena shed light on understanding our contemporaneous urban experience? The telephone, beeper, cellular, facsimile, e-mail, video and DVD as our present means of communication, offer a seemingly infinite number of resources to an increasing number of people. And so, this line of research follows suit and becomes inclusive of various disciplines and ways of conceptualizing. In this spirit I have attempted to incorporate film as well as both historical and critical writings from architecture, the humanities, and social sciences to formulate a new way to understand public space in our contemporary urban environments. This research was initially conducted as a graduate student (in a post-professional degree program) and was made possible by the promotion of multidisciplinary approaches in education and scholarship at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and the Visual and Environmental Studies Department. More recently, as an instructor at the Boston Architectural Center, these ideas where further discussed and developed in a graduate level design studio which I co-taught with Emily Mueller and Karen Nelson.

IN-BETWEEN SPACE

The point of departure for this discussion is Christine Boyer's book *City of Collective Memory* of 1994, and specifically her presentation of *in-between space*. Boyer critiques certain recent -

and mostly privately funded- methods of development which tend to turn their backs on public interests and deny the need for truly accessible public space. As such, these developments abandon an inter-connected and cohesive overall vision for the cities where they occur. As these developments increase in numbers, so too do the number of abandoned, underdeveloped *in-between spaces*.

In the book Boyer presents her version of three historical ways of viewing the city: first, the *City as a Work of Art*, which was highly dependent on the idea of the frame; it was thus set apart and seen as a unified whole with a center; second, the *City* as *Panorama*, with its new modes of transportation lending themselves to a sequential visual experience versus the previously fixed/one-point perspective point of view; and third, the *City of Spectacle*, which brings us up to the present. She goes on to state that within the *City of Spectacle*, for the first time, "...*the pedestrian travels across a sequence of disparate elements ... whose complex montage annihilates the in-between space*". If anything, a closer look is necessary at how one traverses within and between these "*disparate elements*." For the sake of this investigation, the word *travels* becomes operative. Is motion and its various modes- walking, running, driving, or transit- overlooked? How does one travel *to* and *through* the city? The answer may be that we do all of these in very simple ways, and sometimes we do them in slightly more complex and seemingly convoluted ways. After all, as we shall see in these films a traveler is not necessarily a nomad and may have many less transient identities, metaphorically, mentally, spiritually, physically, virtually and actually.

This investigation looks specifically at the mental and physical travel of individuals across the city, as they attempt to come to terms with their local terrain — the terrain within them and around them. Hence the question of scale must be addressed. *In-between space* has different meanings at different scales. For instance, it exists within the varied scales of architecture, landscape architecture, urban planning, and regional planning. The first of these may be seen as mostly pedestrian. The later two begin to incorporate mass transit and infrastructure — predominantly non-pedestrian modes of transit. Of course there is always going to be moments of overlap. As an initial attempt to focus this filmic investigation, the clips originally chosen dealt with the specific sites where the pedestrian experienced -either by walking along, cutting across or into- the later two larger and more conspicuous scales of *in-between space*. What became apparent is that this sub-category of *in-between space* was the site of introspection, discovery, and the making of individual and collective identity. Transit not only can structure the city montage but can provide structures which promotes the making of public *in-between space*.

IN DEFENSE OF *IN-BETWEEN SPACE*

First we take the time to prepare for this journey; we can begin our travels with Wim Wenders storyteller: a contemplative elderly

man in Germany's State Library, Berlin, and begin with some very basic concerns (first clip):

> Tell me muse of the story teller who was thrust to the edge of the world ... childlike, ancient ... and through him reveal every man. With time my listeners became my readers. They no longer sit in a circle ... instead they sit apart ... and one knows nothing about the other. I am an old man with a brittle voice ... but the tale rises from deep down ... and the slightly open mouth repeats it...

We thus set the stage for our quest. I propose that *in-between space* is not at all annihilated but is in fact incorporating new and old types of spaces, space making, and includes various modes of transportation. These spaces eventually develop their own characteristics which in turn influence and effect our internal and external terrain - effecting our physical existence in both: 1)personal/private, and 2)public, highly visible, and tactile ways.

Film clips to be shown: *Open City* (Rome, 1945, by Rossolini), *confession along a train line, "scatter at the railroad tracks"(near the EUR); The Naked City* (New York, 1948, by J. Dassin), *"...it was not photographed in the studio", the subway "...on their way home", chase scene #1, and chase scene #2 from tomb stone yard to the bridge with baby strollers, jump ropers, skaters, and a final view of the city; Wings of Desire* (Berlin, 1987, by W. Wenders), *the password (with historic footage), death on a bridge over the metro.*

Has *in-between space* and its public function of mediating between entities disappeared? While seen in light of recent private developments this may at first seem to be the case.[1] However, is it so for various other conditions of our recent past and our present? The glimpses of Rome, New York and Berlin (a confession by a railroad track, and a mass transit bridge co-existing with strollers and skaters) would make that answer "no." If one is to understand *in-between space* as simultaneously housing movement, interaction, discussion and inhabitation, where is this space in our contemporary urban situation? In viewing the media of one form of travel -film-and in visiting certain architectural and anthropological writings, a clear answer to these questions may be constructed. The works shown of German film-maker Wim Wenders, as well as *Open City* and *The Naked City*, represent urban means of travel that provide a new paradigm for understanding our contemporaneous experience of community. The same becomes apparent in the writings of John R. Kellet, John Stilgoe, and Marc Auge.

The various forms and manifestations of *in-between space* are a highly relevant topic in the writing of the French anthropologist, Marc Auge. Here, I refer specifically to his 1995 book, *Non-Places: introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity.* According to Auge, the contemporary world, a world which he points out is increasingly *"super modern,"* is attracting anthropological scrutiny because of its numerous accelerated transformations. In an effort to understand what we are becoming versus what we were, he looks at transformations in perceptions of time, space and the production of the individual — how do we image ourselves? Think of Wender's characters, as they gaze at their own reflections seemingly and momentarily in a state of introspection while they are in transit. Auge goes on to define non-places as spaces which *"... are not anthropological places and which designate any earlier places to 'places of memory'* (because of their failure to integrate the earlier places)."[2] However, he points out that anthropological place is ambiguous due to its geometric nature:

> It (anthropological place) can be mapped in terms of three simple spatial forms...the line, the intersection of lines, and the point of intersection. Concretely, in everyday geography more familiar to us, they correspond to routes, axes or paths that lead from one place to another and have been traced by people; to crossroads and open spaces...and lastly, to centres.[3]

He additionally points out that these tools which facilitate this spatial

mapping (routes, crossroads, open spaces, centers, etc.) are not exclusive, but are in fact mutually inclusive. With this understanding of *anthropological place,* and how it therefore differs from the *non-place,* we can appreciate the possible formula "space = place + motion."[4] In other words, the making of space is dependent on *place* and *motion* as mutually inclusive. Thus, we open up a new vantage point from which to analyze contemporary spaces of travel, and specifically, the concept of public *in-between space* as dependent on motion — in this case, transit.

As previously stated, in attempting to focus the initial investigation to the landscape of the railroad track in the city, what became almost immediately apparent was that *in-between space* can be many things and is informed by many precedents. It is for example, the corridor/carve-outs left by the auto-baun in Wender's Berlin, or the empty lots — no man's land — seen in *The Naked City.* In any case, it is my belief that its various manifestations inform one another and that however vast our final definition of *in-between space* may be, our understanding is contingent upon the notion of center, periphery, and their ongoing definition, transformations and overlaps. Therefore, not only is the movement between these three — center, periphery, and *in-between space* — important, but so to the process wherein one becomes another through time and the transformations of its surroundings. Take for example, a train station in S. Laurieston, Glasgow — once periphery (1858), then interstitial(1913). Could it's future also see it as center? The same goes for train stations throughout Europe. The ongoing process and development of the plan of Paris, with its various train stations, is yet another good example.

Both in Europe and the Americas, the *sight* of railroad travel and the *site* of the railway, eventually has an influence on other modes of travel such as mass transit and highway travel for example. As justification for this line of investigation, I've looked at the writings of a few historians to help scrutinize the influence of the railroad. What we find is that Boyer is not the first to speculate on the supposed annihilation of *in-between space.* Two decades before her, Wolfgang Schivelbusch points out the destructive side of the railroad: its destruction of space-the *space between* points. Schivelbusch takes note that as early as 1839 in the *Quarterly Review,* it is speculated that if *"railroads were to be established all over England the entire population of the country would be closer by two thirds of the time which now keeps them apart... as distance is annihilated the surface of the country would shrivel in size... becoming one immense city".* Auge in our present day eventually echoes this in describing what has become a reality of *supermodernity;* in discussing transformations in our contemporary perception of space, he states: *"we are in an era characterized by changes of scale... rapid means of transport have brought any capital within a few hours of any other".*

Schivelbusch was also quick to point out the railroads duality, for *"... space was both diminished and expanded ... incorporating new areas into the transport system".* But, he goes on to say that *"the railway knows only points of departure and points of destination hence, the traveler becomes like a parcel, untouched by the space traversed."* Are we to believe this to be true? Are we to conclude that Schivelbusch never once had a meaningful if not at least interesting conversation while in transit? Do we all thus become anonymous FedEx packages? This somewhat limiting point of view is also contested or updated by our experience of *supermodernity.* Even in this high speed, free flowing world of *supermodernity* we still have check points, waiting rooms, and assigned seating providing moments where time, space and even identity may be recorded and shared. Of course, while in the journey, most of us are free to choose whether/or what we share if we decide to share anything at all. However, historically these have been and will continue to be either one of two things: first, points of interchange and free communication; or second, control points for suppressing or the carrying out of varied forms of insurrection. This was briefly represented in the *Open City* clip —*"...scatter at the railroad tracks".* Hints of the second could also be seen by the mid 20th

century with the completion of Moscow's extensive metro system. In a recent essay by Akos Moranvansky, *The Moscow Metro a Total Work of Art* this issue of surveillance is discussed:

> The Metro, with its army of guards and conductors, detailed tables of rules, and pocket instruction manuals, was a major instrument for the control of the masses. They were treated by the totalitarian state as an abstract entity, channeled through the escalators and marble halls that were a pompous back-drop to their state-controlled everyday life.[5]

This project looks specifically at *those, that* and *these* which are touched (so to speak) by the space traversed and vice versa; for as stated once before, the reverse is also true. Space is dependent on the traversing of these, that and those. It further contends that we are not to be identified merely by the bar codes of the ubiquitous FedEx package.

It is the railroad which engenders discernible and highly conspicuous *in-between spaces* not only from the point of view of the traveler but as depicted in these films: from the point of view of the pedestrian, the inhabitants of the city, the flanneurs, the nomads, the living and the dead, the young Alice of *Alice in the Cities* (Wenders, 1972) and the old muse in *Wings of Desire* (Wenders, 1987).

This investigation is further justified by the railway's influence on urban development. This development is studied by both John R. Kellet in *The Impact of Railways on Victorian Cities* (1969), and John Stilgoe in *Metropolitan Corridors* (1983). As many of us already know, the earliest railroad stations were not an integral part of the city fabric, most were located just outside the city limits. However, as J. Kellet points out, *"soon ... enough the space required was comparable with that of any other commercial or industrial land users."* And as J. Stilgoe points out, in addition to rural, suburban, and urban environments, the trains and their right-of-way create a fourth distinctive environment: the *"metropolitan corridor"*— a new environment in the city. Many of the *metropolitan corridor*'s support facilities and side effects are presently among the numerous industrial sites which are in a state of dis-use and are currently one of the biggest challenges and new ground for transformations of our present day cities.[6] The impact of the trains' increased flow of traffic had additional highly visible ramifications in the heart of the city. Early on, this impact of the train becomes vividly apparent in Baron Von Hauffman's Paris. The increase in the flow of traffic had to be *"accommodated by extensive street re-alignments and improvements"*. Schivelbusch states that Haussman's Paris is *"often seen only as a modification of the city to make it conform to the counter revolutionary strategic needs of the Second Empire,"* when in fact, *"its purpose, like the overall intent of the Bonaparte regime was the advancement of the Bourgeois's business interests."* (As well as interests in/with issues of grandeur, policing etc.)

Again, this is the case not only in Paris but eventually in England, the Americas and other developing countries. In many cases this new landscape became one of demarcation as seen in the views of the chase scene in *The Naked City*, between the privileged classes on one side, and on the other, which is associated with industry, its pollution, low wages and poor working conditions. What we have is an understanding of the impact the railway had on the city. Within a short period of time, we have: first, the gentrification of cities such as Paris with the underclass forced to relocate and inhabit the periphery; second, the experience of disorientation by city dwellers finding themselves amidst drastic change; third, the collision of space-time relations as witnessed by the first railway travelers; and finally, the creation of a new type of space, hitherto completely unknown. Visually, the latter of these was an environment new to many with buildings housing railroad program such as control towers and signal stations. Along it appeared telegraph lines, telephone wires, electric trains, factories and warehouses with their ubiquitous blank facades. For Stilgoe, these last two are important building types which he argues *"are meant to be scrutinized and are eventually used for advertisements."* These are spaces well depicted

by Wenders and can also be seen in the peripheral neighborhood depicted in *The Naked City*. Stilgoe's comment is especially astute when coupled with Auge's description of the non-places of *supermodernity* as being partly defined by the words and texts they offer us: *"their 'instructions for use', which may be prescriptive, prohibitive, or informative ... This establishes the traffic conditions of spaces in which individuals are supposed to interact only with texts...".* However, there is the potential for much more than interaction with text only –the potential for personal authorship. For the occupants of the train and mass transit in the city and its outer limits, the world becomes a series of snap shots and short stories. For the users of the T.G.V. and plane travel of *supermodernity* the snapshots and short stories find various formats, not only the airline company's magazine or the computer animated mapping systems but one's own snap shots. We see the traveler in the *space of in-between*, especially in the work of Wenders, as a potential story reader, or story teller at best.

Hence, *in-between space* is itself in motion -an ongoing process of becoming a new type of space. That space and those that inhabit it are portrayed in various formats: paintings, documentary films, silent films, snap shots, and contemporary motion pictures. All of these become the evidence for my counter argument. In both the periphery's and the inner city's *in-between space*, we see blank facades, mass advertisement, clandestine activities, escape, leisure, play and repose, violence, death, birth and the hopes and stories of each and every one of us which produces memorable experiences of public space.

NOTES

[1] Christine M. Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994).
[2] Marc Auge, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (New York: Verso, 1995).
[3] Ibid., pp. 56-57.
[4] Ibid., pp. 79-80. This formula is derived from Auge's interpretation of Michel de Certeau's notion of place and space
[5] Akos Moravanszky, "The Moscow Metro as a Total Artwork" in *The Architecture of Politics: 1910-1940* (Miami Beach, FL: The Wolfsonian Foundation, 1995).
[6] Vittorio Gregotti, in his editorial comments for "The Abandoned Areas" issue of *Rassegna.* 42/2 (June 1990).

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