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Keywords and Keyboards: the City in the Age of Total Tourism
by Adina Arvatu

Argument

What follows is a series of variations on motifs introduced by Joyce. These variations (Bach called his Klavierübungen, ‘keyboard exercises’) were prompted by some unstable conceptual compounds that she has recourse to in her piece—that we all have recourse to when we engage in cultural criticism. The issue of vocabulary (of ‘keywords’ as culturally central, but complex and contested concepts) is as relevant today as it was for Raymond Williams. Yet, in the spirit of Williams’ analyses, it is worth pointing out that ‘keyword’ itself is no longer the same word, or is less likely to evoke the same practices as it did in the 1950s, for instance, when Williams started accumulating his material. Of the two senses of the word—the ‘significance’ and the ‘search’ sense (Durant 3)—the latter is more likely to be activated for contemporary readers, through its association with their everyday online activities.¹ The first half of my title thus alludes to the manner of my engagement with some of the keywords (the everyday, the dérive, space, utopia) introduced by Joyce, whose very ambiguity and instability—teetering as they are between the actual and the virtual, the critical and the fanciful (romanticized), the material and the imaginary—I believe describe the very situation of cultural criticism today.

The second half of my title takes up the object of Joyce’s discussion, but reformulates it with the help of a very short and intriguing piece by Boris Groys, “The City in the Age of Tourist Reproduction.” In it he distinguishes between two phases of modern tourism—romantic and postromantic—and outlines the impact of both on the character of the city form, which, he argues, was not only “intrinsically utopian” (101), but also “antitourist” (101) at its beginnings. Cities, he explains, have always been “projects for the future” (101), and in separating themselves off from the rest of the world, and especially from the countryside, they situated themselves “outside the natural order,” i.e. in the ou-topos (101). The city “dissociates itself from space as it moves through time” (101). This stylized historical-anthropological account of the
origins of the city in utopian desire becomes then the basis of comparison with the city as we know it. According to Groys, the first phase of modern tourism, which he terms ‘romantic,’ is responsible for “spawn[ing] a distinctly antiutopian attitude toward the city” (102). And that is because

The romantic tourist is not in search of universal utopian models but of cultural differences and local identities. His gaze is not utopian but conservative—directed not at the future but at past provenance. Romantic tourism is a machine designed to transform temporariness into permanence, fleetingness into timelessness, ephemerality into monumentality. [. . .] The touristic gaze romanticizes, monumentalizes, and eternalizes everything that comes within its range. In turn, the city adapts to this materialized utopia, to the medusan gaze of the romantic tourist. (103)

Groys’ formulation itself could raise a romantic objection of sorts, because of its adversity to the materialization of utopia, and its implicit valorization of endlessly open possibilities (a feature of ‘political romanticism’). In this, he is not alone: as David Harvey once noted, “for many contemporary theorists [. . .] that is where the concept [of utopia] can and should remain: as a pure signifier of hope destined never to acquire a material referent” (Spaces of Hope 189). I shall return to ‘utopia’ towards the end of the paper, precisely because an adversity to materialization does not prevent the materialization of other, undesired utopian schemes (and Harvey’s discussion of neoliberalism as an utopia of social process in Spaces of Hope will help drive the point home). Here, it merely serves as context for the next step in Groys’ argument, which I believe deserves some scrutiny.

And this next step consists in describing the current phase of modern tourism, which he characterizes as “postromantic, that is, comfortable and total” (105):

rather than the individual romantic tourist, it is instead all manner of people, things, signs, and images drawn from all kinds of local cultures that are now leaving their places of origin and undertaking journeys around the world. The rigid distinction between romantic world travelers and a locally based, sedentary population is rapidly being erased. Cities are no longer waiting for the arrival of the tourist—they too are starting to join global circulation, to reproduce themselves on a world scale and to expand in all directions. (107)

Countering worries about the ‘globalization of nothing’ and the ‘McDonaldization of society’ owing to such generalized, total tourism of cultural and material forms, Groys insists that cultural differences and local identities (i.e. the object of desire for the romantic tourist) do not disappear but rather “have also embarked on a journey, [and] started to reproduce themselves and to expand” (107). In this, he sees a
reorientation of utopian desire, whose satisfaction is no longer “sought in time, but in space” (106). Indeed, for Groys, “Globalization has replaced the future as the site of utopia. So, rather than practicing avant-garde politics based on the future, we now embrace the politics of travel, migration, and nomadic life, paradoxically rekindling the utopian dimension that had ostensibly died out in the era of romantic tourism” (106-07).

While seductive in its simplicity and optimism, Groys’ schema should make us pause. By positing globalization as the ‘site of utopia,’ does Groys not allow himself to be seduced by free-market utopianism and forget “what happens when the utopianism of process comes geographically to earth” (Spaces of Hope 177), i.e. the concrete material and moral degradations that the neoliberal utopia imposes on the vast majority of the world’s population and environment? The materializations (sittings) of free-market utopianism are not ‘happy’ places. (Groys, in all fairness, does allow for a “dystopian dimension of this utopia” of globalization, which results in a “homogeneity bereft of all universality” [108]: but what prevents these travelling particularisms from generalizing as unjustly as bourgeois class interests were once said to universalize themselves at the expense of the proletariat? Groys does not say.) Also, it seems to me that, far from being replaced, romantic tourism has become nested instead within total tourism, a phenomenon highlighted by the promises of the tourist industry (a break away from the everyday, individualized services, unmediated, total ‘experience,’ authenticity, etc.). In what follows I seek to disturb the neatness and optimism of Groys’ argument, but without succumbing to despair in the face of total tourism.

Finally, much of what follows is an attempt at self-understanding. Joyce’s piece has compelled me to try and make sense of my own recent experience as a temporary resident of Macau, one of the two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of the People’s Republic of China (the other one being Hong Kong). Though both are administered according to the constitutional principle of “one country, two systems,” which mandates that the two former colonies maintain their own democratic and capitalist institutions for at least 50 years after their handover (in 1997 and 1999, respectively), the differences between the two SARs are hard to miss. From surface and population to economic makeup and strength, they seem scales apart. Hong Kong is (still) the major financial center of the region, whereas the main (almost sole) industry in Macau is tourism—especially gambling, or the ‘gaming industry,’ as it is euphemistically called. Tourism is very much the daily bread, and inevitable like it.

Dérive And The Everyday

“It’s hard to be down when you’re up,” read a poster on the 110th floor of one of the World Trade Center towers sometime in the 1970s (Photo 1). We owe this report to Michel de Certeau, who mentions it in passing (92) to underscore the basic idea motivating his project of focusing on ‘everyday practices’ as concrete

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ways of doing things (arts de faire)\textsuperscript{7} that push back against the relentless encroachment of Officialdom on everyday (urban) life. This idea seems commonsensical enough: the view from above—of the urban planner and the city manager—is different from the view from below, precisely because the latter is not so much a ‘view’ as it is a peculiar form of blindness (de Certeau 93) that affects us all as participants to the bustle of the city. Observer/actor, reader/writer, insight/blindness: a fairly easy to survey (and rather classical) kind of distribution of positions and ‘powers, ’ most of them seemingly accruing to the top. That is why it is hard to be down when you’re up: what is at stake is not a logical contradiction, but rather the rhetorical appeal to—and seduction of—capitalization.

For de Certeau, who was writing in the 1970s, the panoptic view from the top floor of the World Trade Center—which until recently allowed one to map Manhattan from on high and make a spectacle of its “extremes of ambition and degradation,” “expenditure and production” (91)—was emblematic of the strategic (totalizing) but ultimately voyeuristic “form of rationality currently dominant in Western culture” (xi). It was “the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive” (92), of the “lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more” (xi): “The panorama-city is a ‘theoretical’ (that is, visual) simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices” (93). In contrast,

The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’ below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city: they are walkers, Wandermänner, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it. (93)

Unsurprisingly, there is tension between the two perspectives, and this tension has always been
there, yet only in modernity, on de Certeau’s account, has it increasingly been experienced as contradiction—i.e. as a polarity between, on the one hand, the apotheosis of scopophilia and, on the other, the proliferation of minute practices that the theoretical ‘drive’ needs to reduce, repress, etc., in order to come into its own.

The two bookends of this historical process of contestation detectable especially at the level of spatial practices are the humanist utopias of the sixteenth century—as modes of “perspective [...] and prospective vision” (93) which “inaugurate [...] the transformation of the urban fact into the concept of a city” (94)—and the contemporary decay of “the Concept-city” (95), which marks a “return of practices” (95), understood primarily in spatial terms (96).

Picking up on Foucault’s analyses of power and disciplinary spaces, de Certeau takes everyday practices to have a structuring or determining role for any (re)articulation of social relations (96), and not only a structured or determined character. Indeed, therein lies their tactical strength (in contradistinction to the strategic impositions of power): everyday practices are “models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society (a status that does not mean they are either passive or docile) is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers’” (xi-xii). As de Certeau insists, when “pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline which is the subject of [his] book” (xv).

An important distinction that de Certeau introduces—and that I want to retain for the present variations on the theme of the city in the age of total tourism—is between a (primary) process of space production9 and “the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization” (xiii). More importantly, this secondary production of space—as a submerged poiesis which the persistent blanket-reference to consumption (in analyses on both the left and the right of the political spectrum) covers over—is not (to be) limited to, nor primarily identified with the activities of ‘counter-cultural’ groups, precisely because such groups tend to self-segregate and (at least aspire to) accrue some form of social distinction or privilege (xii). Consequently, superficial similarities and recorded Lefebvrian sympathies aside, an avant-gardist group like the Situationist International with its programmatic-experimental notion of dérive cannot serve as a paradigmatic case for the everyday practices of urban users (locals, tourists, migrant workers, etc.). Quite on the contrary, the dérive marks the deliberate (‘playful-constructive’) separation from such everyday practices and situations: “In a dérive one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there” (Debord n.p., emphasis added). In that sense, the dérive is “quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll” (Debord). Furthermore, “One can dérive [sic] alone, but all indications are that the

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most fruitful numerical arrangement consists of several small groups of two or three people who have reached the same level of awareness . . . ” (Debord; emphasis added). Awareness—of the ‘psychogeographical contours’ of the city (fissures and microclimates, fixed points and passageways, flows and currents, etc.)—is key to Situationist urban drifting, whereas everyday practices plumb quite different depths and signal drop below the threshold of individual or group awareness.

The immediate benefit, I think, of de Certeau’s distinction for a critical-theoretical reflection on tourism as a culture industry, and for cultural criticism more generally, is precisely that it allows us to break with the assumption of an ever expanding and oppressive field of cultural sameness (consumption), on which much of the official discourse (on the left as on the right) is largely based nowadays. In principle, secondary processes of space production (‘spatial practices’) need not be limited to reproducing the orderings and hierarchies on which an existing cultural hegemony depends. Furthermore, such everyday spatial practices drop below the level of rational action theories (which generally take the individual agent as primitive), without thereby leading to the much-dreaded irrationality of the masses. If anything, they bespeak “an operational logic whose models may go as far back as the age-old ruses of fishes and insects that disguise or transform themselves in order to survive” (xi). Fish schools, insect swarms, mammal herds, murmurations (flocks of starlings in flight), etc., with their uncanny synchronized movements, display this kind of operational logic: they are critical systems, in the sense that they are poised to self-transform in order to respond maximally to environmental perturbations (e.g. predators). The awe-inspiring but fleeting order (Photo 2) is the result of self-organization (rather than centralization and control), which in turn depends on “behavioral correlations” that extend farther than the range of direct interaction among individuals. (The ‘virality’ of cultural memes is likely based on such behavioural correlations, though it is sometimes hard to say to what environmental threat or perturbation it is responding.) The Situationist drift, by contrast, is less a form of response to the urban terrain, and more an imposition of meaning or order on ‘found’ but ultimately indifferent objects and places: the Situationist drifters allow themselves to be seduced by the ‘attractions’ of the terrain, stage ‘encounters’ (i.e. direct interactions), and aestheticize everyday urban experience. In this sense, the Situationist behaves very much like a romantic: urban experience becomes an “occasion” (Schmitt 78-108) for aesthetic experimentation, not a basis for understanding transformative social action.

Thus, with a catchphrase of some currency nowadays, I would say that de Certeau’s everyday practices are an articulation of the hope for the re-politicization of urban life, while the dérive remains trapped in a form of romantic tourism that self-segregates from everyday urban experience in order to aestheticize it. This, in fact, explains why the tourist industry
has been able—so quickly and so thoroughly—to reclaim the dérive for its own purposes, since both privilege the mode of direct interaction, of ‘encounter,’ and (shock) experience (Erlebnis). A further decisive aspect of everyday practices comes to the fore in this context: urban users-cum-producers do not re-appropriate, or reclaim urban spaces, any more than birds re-claim or re-appropriate a park statue. We can still talk consistently about a ‘right to the city,’ as Lefebvre does, and even posit that this right of city inhabitants (citadins, not citizens) can be further specified as a ‘right to appropriation,’ as long as we understand that, “The conception of urban space as private property, as a commodity to be valorized (or used to valorize other commodities) by the capitalist production process, is specifically what the right to appropriation stands against” (Purcell 103). Superficially, it is “the use value aspect of urban space” (103) that both Lefebvre’s ‘right to the city’ and de Certeau’s ‘everyday practices’ are modeled on, though their ultimate referent remains value tout court, as a social relation that becomes visible and measurable only in its effects in the spheres of exchange and use (see below, the section on Space). The novelty of the discourse of rights that both Lefebvre and de Certeau seek to inaugurate comes from this discourse’s orientation away from issues of justification or legitimation (the Kantian questio quid juris) and back towards the quid facti of everyday urban experience. It is a description of

the microbe-like, singular and plural practices which an urbanistic system was supposed to administer or suppress, but which have outlived its decay; […] the swarming activity of these procedures that, far from being regulated or eliminated by panoptic administration, have reinforced themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy . . . (de Certeau 96)

In sum, everyday urban life is constituted by infraction—that is, it “invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others” (xii); at its most benign, it has the structure of an overdraft, rather than a deposit. In that sense, it has the effect of ruination (hence the ‘decay’ of the Concept-city): not the destruction, but rather a wearing-out of social forms and relations as embodied (localized) in urban spaces, until they become threadbare and see-through.

Space

The World Trade Center towers are down, and de Certeau’s account of everyday practices needs to be returned to its ground zero. Indeed, though intuitive, his analogization of everyday practices to enunciative acts on the linguistic model of performance rather than competence (xiii)—such that walking, for him the paradigm case for everyday practices, becomes an act of “pedestrian enunciation” (99)—imposes undue limitations on his approach. His proposal for a “walking rhetorics” (100ff), for instance, which assumes that “the ‘tropes’ catalogued by rhetoric furnish models and hypotheses for the analysis of ways of appropriating places” (100), carries with it a strong sense of patterning or, better

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yet, of ‘mapping,’ which de Certeau otherwise explicitly rejects. Unless we are willing to take such catalogue of tropes as not just incomplete but also interminable, admitting of ever new figures that may or may not be the result of a combination of previously encountered ones, the theoretical panopticism that de Certeau tried so hard to put out the door is invited right back in with the assumption that spatial practices are surveyable tropologically. The danger of aestheticizing everyday practices is thereby reintroduced as well. (Plus, mathematical and physical modeling of dynamic systems, as other ways of ‘mapping’ crowd movements during street protests, or flows of tourists, etc., probably have more to tell us about collective responses to an environment than classical tropology. What would the latter tell us, say, about the way in which pedestrians move through a busy public square as they try to avoid stepping into someone’s selfie, or photobomb it instead?)

To reformulate, the problem de Certeau struggles with is the very task of building a ‘theory’ from the ground up (rather than top down). Therefore, a supplementation of his approach can most meaningfully come from someone who, like David Harvey, is not only sympathetic to a Lefebvrian project of resisting the neoliberal restructuring of urban life and the attendant disenfranchisement of urban inhabitants, but also quite appreciative of the difficulties inhering in the task of redefining ‘theory’ such that the multiplicity of practices is maintained rather than reduced. More concretely, I believe de Certeau’s account of everyday spatial practices can be made more precise by seeking to specify, with Harvey, the kind (or kinds) of space that they are supposed to be producing.

To begin with, de Certeau’s distinction between place (lieu) and space (espace), while suggestive, proves unstable and insufficient. Thus, according to him, “A place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence” (117), whereas “A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables” (117). However, de Certeau’s characterization of a place (lieu) as “exclud[ing] the possibility of two things being in the same location (place)” and as being ruled by “the law of the ‘proper’” (117) seems to suggest, on the contrary, that the order governing the formation of a lieu cannot be ‘of whatever kind’ but rather only of a (classical) logical kind. De Certeau is consistent in privileging the other end of the polarity, namely space, which for him is a “practiced place” (117), but his own characterizations call for an evening of the balance, since place need not be ‘practiced’ to become space, but rather already presupposes (or articulates) a particular kind of space, i.e. one of individuation. Which is why I suggest we call it, with Harvey, absolute space:

Absolute space is fixed and we record or plan events within its frame. This is the space of Newton and Descartes and it is usually represented as a pre-existing and immovable grid amenable to standardized measurement and open to calculation.
Geometrically, it is the space of Euclid and therefore the space of all manner of cadastral mapping and engineering practices. It is a primary space of individuation—*res extensa* as Descartes put it—and this applies to all discrete and bounded phenomena including you and me as individual persons. Socially this is the space of private property and other bounded territorial designations (such as states, administrative units, city plans, and urban grids). (*Spaces of Global Capitalism* 121)

Conversely, what de Certeau calls *space (espace)*—which is “composed of intersections of mobile elements,” or “actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (117)—also calls for qualification, precisely because it does not distribute as neatly as he assumes to the side of everyday practices. Pace de Certeau, ‘space’ is in fact to be found on the other side of his divide as well, e.g. as ‘actuated’ by the various capitalist processes (financial flows, circulation of commodities, etc.) that, at the time that he was writing but also, or perhaps especially since 1980s, have been restructuring urban centers and disenfranchising urban residents. In it, we can easily recognize *relative space*, the second in Harvey’s tripartite schema:

The relative notion of space is mainly associated with the name of Einstein and the non-Euclidean geometries that began to be constructed most systematically in the 19th century. Space is relative in the double sense: that there are multiple geometries from which to choose and that the spatial frame depends crucially upon what it is that is being relativized and by whom. [...] At the more mundane level of geographical work, we know that the space of transportation relations looks and is very different from the spaces of private property. The uniqueness of location and individuation defined by bounded territories in absolute space gives way to a multiplicity of locations that are equidistant from, say, some central city location. (121-22)

More importantly, “All of this relativization [...] does not necessarily reduce or eliminate the capacity for calculability or control, but it does indicate that special rules and laws are required for the particular phenomena and processes under consideration” (123). What this means, for a de Certeauian approach, is that the same way that a rhetorics of walking cannot but re-inscribe everyday practices in a space of visibility, making (relative) space an exclusive feature of such practices misunderstands the very processes (e.g. the rhythms of capital accumulation, or climate change) that they are supposed to resist and transform.

Thankfully, Harvey can also offer a potential solution to this difficulty. I would suggest that de Certeau’s ‘secondary production of space,’ which is hidden in everyday practices and obfuscated by the blanket-reference to consumption, concerns the third kind of space, on Harvey’s schema, namely *relational space*. His characterization of it is probably the clearest:

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The relational concept of space is most often associated with Leibniz who, in a famous series of letters to Clarke [...] objected vociferously to the absolute view of space and time so central to Newton's theories. His primary objection was theological. Newton made it seem as if even God was inside of absolute space and time rather than in command of spatio-temporality. By extension, the relational view of space holds [that] there is no such thing as space or time outside of the processes that define them. [...] Processes do not occur in space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process. (123)

On this understanding, identity or individuality is no longer determined by the place it (alone) occupies in absolute space, but rather by “everything else going on around it” (124): “A wide variety of disparate influences swirling over space in the past, present and future concentrate and congeal at a certain point [...] to define the nature of that point” (124). In short, relational space is monadological (124), but we could also call it intensive, or—from yet another vantage—expressive.

That this is indeed the level at which everyday practices—as the paradigm for ‘consumer production’—are to be studied is made clear by de Certeau’s insistence that, “The examination of such practices does not imply a return to individuality [social atomism]. [...] A relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and [...] each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact” (xi). Walter Benjamin’s flâneur is a good example of such ambiguous or unstable identities resulting from the intersection, in a particular place and time (nineteenth-century Paris16), of a great number of incoherent and even contradictory relational determinations: cultured and aesthetically-astute, he (usually) is a detached observer of the comings and goings of the city, an aimless roamer putting his purposelessness on display while secretly hoping for a buyer. He is a romantic tourist at home. Hence, his complicity with (mimicry of) the commodity form: his insularity and near-idiomatic uniqueness (the word flâneur is best left untranslated, we are told) are the effect of processes of capital circulation and accumulation. Similarly, Lefebvre’s citadin (the subject of his proposal for a new form of urban politics) reveals itself, to a critical analysis, to be no less ambiguous and unstable (Purcell 105f.): a subject whose political membership is no longer determined by citizenship but by inhabitance, whose political agenda is determined by class interests, but also environmental and social justice concerns, whose movements in geographic space blur the distinctions between locals and tourists (e.g. migrant workers, ‘precariat’), consumers and producers, etc., and whose empowerment and participation in contingent and urban-hegemonic politics could lead again to insularity and withdrawal from larger-scale political struggles (regional, national, global).

What would be the direct benefits of my proposed clarification-cum-supplementation of de Certeau’s analysis? First and foremost, it
tells us that—understood relationally—everyday practices are only measurable in their effects in absolute and relative space-time. To get a better grasp of what that means, we can take Harvey’s mapping of Marx’s three key concepts of value in *Capital* onto his tripartite division of possible conceptualizations of space (*Spaces of Global Capitalism* 141f.). As Harvey points out, “Everything that pertains to use value lies in the province of absolute space and time” (141): workers, equipment, factories, infrastructure, etc. Just as everything having to do with exchange value needs to be understood in a relative space-time framework, because exchange is all about circulation (of commodities, money, people, etc.). But

Value is [...] a relational concept. Its referent is, therefore, relational space-time. Value, Marx states (somewhat surprisingly), is immaterial but objective. [...] As a consequence, value does not “stalk about with a label describing what it is” but hides its relationality within the fetishism of commodities. The only way we can approach it is via that peculiar world in which material relations are established between people [...] and social relations are constructed between things [...]. Value is, in short, a social relation. As such, it is impossible to measure except by way of its effects. (141)

This allows us to better understand de Certeau’s claim at the beginning, according to which a secondary process of production is ‘hidden’ in the process of utilization and ‘concealed’ by a blanket-reference to consumption (exchange): the expressive relationality (value) of everyday practices can only be observed and measured in its effects in absolute and relative space-time, and especially in the way in which they fissure and open up these spatiotemporal frames themselves. Which means that, to understand such practices and build a theory thereof, all three spatial frameworks (absolute, relative, and relational) are necessary: “no priority can be accorded to any one [of them]” (142).

Furthermore, because values (social relations) require excavation, as it were, all kinds of competences—political-economic, philosophical, anthropological, literary, etc., but also and perhaps especially those ‘subjugated knowledges’ that Foucault posited as a foil to global theories17—are necessary in order to interpret their spatial effects. Thus, de Certeau’s emphasis on performance at the expense of competence in his characterization of everyday practices (i.e. their blindness) should not be taken as a symptom of a starkly unequal distribution of competences between theory and practice (with knowledge and power accruing to the former at the expense of the latter). Rather it signals the irreducible embeddedness of theory in practice, and hence the transformative potential of overlooked, devalued, economically-suppressed practices that in myriad ways dis-place hegemonic social orderings and spatialities.

Lastly, what an emphasis on everyday practices seems to me to suggest is a shift in our understanding of culture (as both *Kultur* and
One way (attenuated but still present in post-industrial, First World countries) is to think of Kultur as individualized and embodied in institutions (localized), and of Bildung (education) as the engine of social self-differentiation or self-distinction at both individual and supra-individual levels. (Identity politics, which is based on bounded territorialities, privileges the absolute spatio-temporal framework and translates into a patrimonial approach to culture.) Another way (predominant under neoliberalism) is to think of culture on the model of exchange and capital accumulation: Kultur thus becomes an ‘exchange of ideas’ where patrimonial goods are liberated from the law of the place, as de Certeau would say, and reinserted into circulation, while Bildung is understood as investment (money especially), acquiring and putting into circulation symbolic assets (skills), capitalization, etc. (The spatio-temporal framework thereby privileged is the relative one: there is no stronger de-territorializing force than capital.) There is, finally, a third way, and it seems to me that therein lies the emancipatory hope that de Certeau’s everyday practices articulate—and all the other analyses (Benjamin, Lefebvre, Harvey, to mention just the ones touched on here) that take culture as a value-concept (a Wertbegriff, as Weber once called it), that is, a relational-expressive concept. It is the hope of a lived and living culture understood as a critical system, i.e. a system poised to self-transform to better respond to environmental threats, rather than a hegemonic order built by command and control. Balzac’s line—“Hope is Memory that Desires”—could in fact be a motto for this attempt at a transvaluation of the value of culture, in response to its objective devaluation under conditions of patrimonial and especially neoliberal administration. Hope, memory, desire: the relational (intensive, expressive), value-ridden aspects of the everyday, on which all dreams of a better life, all utopias are built (including capitalist ones). As constitutive of the social imaginary that bridges history and individual biographies, they are the engine of social transformation. Perhaps the contemporary problem of theory (social, political, critical, literary, etc.) is not so much to awaken from, say, the phantasmagorias of the nineteenth, twentieth, or even twenty-first centuries, but rather—lest we let our lucidity become another form of enchantment—to start asking, how do we dream better dreams?

Utopia

It may seem odd to talk about Macau under the heading of utopia. And yet, it is the only way that I can make sense of this place, which for little over a year attracted and repulsed me in equal measure. As I prepare to leave it, I cannot but ask myself: have I been a tourist all this time? As a member of the so-called ‘precariat,’ dreaming of a less precarious situation than what the everyday affords me, do I not confirm Groys’
diagnosis that “we now all live in a world where living and traveling have become synonymous, where there is no longer any perceptible difference between the city’s residents and its visitors” (108)? What kind of ‘right to the city’ do I have (if any)? And when did I have it (if I did): after I spent more than a year in the city?20

Macau is washed by the waves of tourists the way its shores are washed by the waves of the South China Sea: constantly, but with the occasional storm and stress of popular holidays and feast days.21 Tourism and tourists are here unavoidable. But so is utopian desire. Macau is an open archaeological record of various utopian plans as they touched ground, materialized as built spaces, and then decayed. Walking around the city becomes an exercise in reading (however distractedly) and re-describing this record.22

The oldest European (Portuguese) colony in Asia (1557) and the last to be handed over (December 20, 1999),23 Macau stands at the “spatiotemporal intersection of the failed projects of Maoist socialism and Portuguese empire as well as the twin dreams of a local phantasmagoric consumer utopia and a Chinese socioeconomic hybrid of ‘market socialism’” (Simpson 1054). Furthermore, as Simpson aptly notes, “Spatial production,24 not linear temporal evolution, defines the city” (1055), in the sense that all of these partially materialized and then failed utopian projects do not erase one another but rather coexist in often startling proximity on this minuscule island city. It is this startling proximity that allows Simpson to offer a ‘reading’ of Macau as a juxtaposition of four coexisting “moments” (or, with another keyword, archives): “socialist fossil, colonial ruin, capitalist dream, and utopian wish” (1053).

Memory (fossil/ruin), dream, and wish: this Benjaminian threefold spells out those intensive (or expressive-relational) aspects of capital that only become apparent in certain juxtapositions of past and present (‘dialectical images,’ or images of obsolescence) that bring “to consciousness the rapid half-life of the utopian element in commodities” (Buck-Morss 293) and the spaces of capital. However, to understand this utopian element and reactivate its emancipatory potential, it may be useful to distinguish, with Harvey again, between “utopias of spatial form” (Spaces of Hope 159-73) and “utopias of temporal process” (173-79), or of development. The first kind is the most familiar (e.g. More’s Utopia, Bacon’s New Atlantis, but also nineteenth-century utopian schemes like Fourrier’s or Blanqui’s), and the kind that de Certeau had in mind when he spoke of the emergence of the Concept-city in the sixteenth century. Such an utopia of spatial form is “an artificially created island which functions as an isolated, coherently organized, and largely closed-space economy (though closely monitored relations with the outside world are posited),” where—to put the contrast in stark, simplified terms—“spatial form controls temporality, an imagined geography controls the possibility of social change and history” (160). The aim of such utopias is social harmony and stability (hence, their

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critical edge vis-à-vis the actual political and social states of affairs contemporary with them), and in pursuit of that goal they operate a whole series of exclusions, generally of any social force or process (especially market and capital forces: money, wage labor, capital accumulation, etc.) that could be disruptive of the perfected social and moral orders they are proposing. (It is this kind of utopia of spatial form that Groys had in mind when he posited that the city form was originally anti-nature and antitourist.)

Other than perhaps the old walls of Macau (built and fortified starting in the sixteenth-century, now mostly collapsed), there is little to remind one of this kind of utopia here, unless we are prepared to regard the Fisherman's Wharf—a theme-park and shopping complex built in 2005-2006, partially on reclaimed land, and featuring “themed reproductions of a Roman Coliseum, Tang Dynasty Chinese architecture, buildings from Amsterdam, Lisbon, Cape Town, and Miami, and an exploding volcano” (Simpson 1055)—and all casino-hotel-mall-and-wellness complexes in Macau (also themed) as exemplars of “degenerate utopias” (Spaces of Hope 164ff.). Like Disneyland (Marin’s paradigmatic case of such degeneration, resulting from the deliberate dulling of the critical edge of the utopian impulse), such mega-complexes “eliminate the troubles of actual travel by assembling the rest of the world, properly sanitized and mythologized, into one place of pure fantasy containing multiple spatial orders” (Spaces of Hope 167). However, I suspect that they would be better described as mimetic spatial forms in which the neoliberal utopianism of the free market (as a particular form of an utopia of temporal process) comes down to earth, that is, materializes itself as built environment. (This would confirm Benjamin’s insight into the atavisms of modernity: the newer market utopianism takes on the idealized spatial forms of older, anti-market utopianism to support its ideological claims of emancipation, prosperity, equality, etc.) This is precisely why, as Harvey points out, such degenerate utopias “instantiate rather than critique the idea that ‘there is no alternative’” (168), the mantra of neoliberal thinking.

If utopias of spatial form are an idealized way of imagining and producing space—as “a container of social processes and as an expression of moral order” (Spaces of Hope 174)—then utopias of process represent “idealized versions of social processes [. . . ] expressed in purely temporal terms” (174). They are “placeless teleologies”: “ Whereas More gives us the spatial form but not the process, Hegel and Marx give us their distinctive versions of the temporal process but not the ultimate spatial form” (174). And they are distinctive, according to Harvey, precisely because the logic informing the unfolding of the historical and social process is, in Hegel, of the ‘both-and’ kind (Aufhebung names both the destruction and the preservation of the old in the new), whereas in Marx it is of an ‘either-or’ type (the new order abolishes the old). The dominant utopianism of process today, as in Marx’s time, is the utopianism of the market, first given expression by Adam Smith in 1776, in which “individual desires, avarice, greed, drives, creativity, and the like could be
mobilized through the hidden hand of the perfected market to the benefit of all” (175), and further refined and entrenched by neoliberal economics since the 1980s. Interestingly, market utopianism appears to be an ‘either-or’ kind of proposition (the market is supposed to supplant all forms of social cohesion and state powers) but in fact operates after the logic of ‘both-and’ (since it in fact requires both the restriction of certain functions of the state and the expansion of others, to ensure that the framework for free market and open trade is legally codified and enforced).

Contemporary Macau is to a large extent the product of China’s adoption of market socialism. Proposed by Deng Xiaoping in the early 1980s ahead of the talks for the reunification with Hong Kong and Macau, the constitutional principle of “one country, two systems” (socialism on the mainland, capitalism in the two former colonial enclaves) enshrines precisely this odd utopianism of social process according to which “China must pass through a capitalist stage in order to attain true socialist utopia” (Simpson 1057). The surprising aspect of market socialism, however, is not so much the fact that it renounces the ‘either-or’ logic of Marxist (or even Maoist) orthodoxy, but rather that the ‘both-and’ logic it overtly espouses does not lead to what Harvey calls the ‘romanticism of endlessly open possibilities.’ On the contrary, it generates a proliferation of economic and social experiments that take very peculiar (and uneven) geographic and spatial forms—Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Special Administrative Regions (SARs), Free Trade Zones (FTZs), etc. (The explanation, I suspect, lies in the fact that, unlike utopians of democratic process like Lefebvre or de Certeau, the Communist Party has no trouble assuming the authoritarianism required by the geographic and spatial materializations of their hybrid utopian scheme.)

Thus, like so many coastal Special Economic Zones (SEZs) set up, since the 1980s, in The Pearl River Delta and elsewhere on the mainland, the two SARs of Hong Kong and Macau have the status of economic laboratories of the PRC. Unlike the SEZs, however, they pose peculiar political challenges in virtue of their surviving democratic structures, some more ‘live’ than others. Hong Kong again takes the lead, with a strong tradition of public debate and militancy for democratic rights. Macau, on the other hand, seems for the most part to confirm W.H. Auden’s verdict in the 1930s:

A weed from Catholic Europe, it took root Between some yellow mountains and a sea, Its gay stone houses an exotic fruit A Portugal-cum-China oddity.
Rococo images of Saint and Saviour Promise its gamblers fortunes when they die, Churches alongside brothels testify That faith can pardon natural behaviour.
A town of such indulgence need not fear Those mortal sins by which the strong are killed And limbs and governments are torn to pieces.
Religious clocks will strike, the childish vices Will safeguard the low virtues of the child And nothing serious can happen here.

(“Macao,” Collected Poems 145)
In the fast-tracked development of Macau post-handover, brand names have joined the ‘rococo images of Saint and Saviour,’ and the international-themed, neo-rococo casinos and malls testify that money too can pardon natural behaviour. The social infantilization of consumers (locals and tourists alike) seems to have seamlessly taken over from the religious infantilization of the colonized, as the history of colonization itself has been patrimonialized and commodified by the private-public partnership between the tourist industry and the government of Macau. (The old city center of Macau, composed of Portuguese government buildings, Catholic churches, piazzas, etc., was declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2006.) With few exceptions, there are no notable popular movements of resistance to the ‘occult’ levels of capital accumulation and political disenfranchisement in Macau: it would seem that Auden was quite right, and nothing serious could ever happen here.

Simpson’s striking characterization of Macau’s economic resurgence post-handover and especially post-liberalization of the gaming industry in the 2000s is thus quite apt: “For so long the subject of afterthought and oversight, the lack of attention to which served pragmatic ends for both Portugal and China, tiny Macao is now at the center of China’s development largely because of its location at the periphery” (Simpson 1054). Its marginality and insularity serve the strategic goals of China’s hybrid utopianism, which beginning in the 1980s, under the reformist leadership of Deng Xiaoping, has left the Maoist ‘industrialization without urbanization’ behind and set new the revolutionary goals for the Communist Party: “The socialist market economy’s role would be [. . . ] to accelerate the modernization of the country’s ‘means of production’ and create a new majority class—the modern, industrial proletariat. Only then could the Party accomplish the transition from capitalism to socialism—a second, ‘truer’ revolution” (Chuihua et al. 79). Yet, rather than a productive class with a cohesive social makeup and bond, this ‘new majority class’ is more and more groomed to behave like a mass of consumers. In an ironic inversion of Maoist reeducation programs, Macau is now “a didactic laboratory for nascent Chinese consumerist pedagogy” (Simpson 1072). Thus, if China’s realignment has in fact solidified the global neoliberal belief in the ‘inevitability’ of the market, planned or free (since the so-called free market too requires the cooperation of the State, not its dissolution), and if Macau is, indeed, “exemplary” (Simpson 1074) for this belief—if, in other words, it is a space of globalization, with all the inequalities (social, political, economic, environmental, etc.) attendant on the materializations (sittings) of market utopianism—how could it also be a ‘space of hope,’ in a sense that would go beyond the utopia of consumption it is becoming at such a dizzying pace?

This is where I believe de Certeau’s focus on everyday practices could come into play. Macau’s historical marginality—manifest in its geographic location, its economic irrelevance to the Portuguese empire for most of the twentieth century, its political convenience for both pre- and post-1949 China—is now symbolic.
of that ‘marginality of a majority’ (de Certeau xvii) which pertains to the “cultural activity of the non-producers of culture, an activity that is unsigned, unreadable, and unsymbolized, [and that] remains the only one possible for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself” (xvii). I can think of no better example of such ‘cultural activity of the non-producers of culture’ than the insignificant scene I witnessed one day on the gambling floor of the Venetian, one of the two most exclusive and opulent casinos in Macau: an old ‘mainlander’ (the non-neutral moniker applied to tourists from mainland China) in brown plastic slippers as she slowly but without hesitation made her way towards one of the baccarat tables (minimum bet of ca. 50 euros), holding a tall glass of milk. Her ‘activity’ (barely an action on a classical sociological account) and appearance (likely the result of long years of forced rusticated existence under Mao and his socialist utopian scheme) had the effect of throwing into relief the phantasmagoria of the Venetian as a setting and siting of Chinese market utopianism.

Such marginal and contingent cultural activity, which constitutes the tactical side of consumption and comprises all “the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong” (xvii), could be seen as a collective response to the abstract (strategic) equivalences and huge material inequalities of market economy. It is the flip side to the glib-side of total tourism: a universality of marginality (de Certeau xvii) in response—yet rarely in explicit opposition—to globalization’s ‘homogeneity bereft of all universality’ (Groys 108). If the hope is that this universality of marginality could become the basis of a new emancipatory urban politics, of new and unforeseen forms of solidarity that could counter the self-segregating and alienating tendencies of official culture, if that indeed is the hope, then Macau—this disunified collection of diachronic and synchronic particularisms which often translate into tensions at precisely the level of everyday practices—may yet have what it takes: a memory that still desires.

Independent Scholar

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1 The ‘search’ sense occurs in text editing, database management systems, programming, etc., as an index or parameter that allows one to identify and retrieve a particular kind of information. The ‘significance’ sense has to do with the importance of the word for opening up, or deciphering something else (as a ‘key’ or a cipher); by extension, it refers to something of great importance. Though the two senses are not always easily separable without further context, “There is [...] an important difference between [them] that concerns how you view what happens once you’ve found an instance of your keyword. In one case, your search is over. In the other, it is just beginning” (Durant 3).
See pp. 173-81 esp.

Both books by George Ritzer, published in 2004 and 1993, respectively.

HK: ca. 1,100 sq km, population of ca.7 mil. Macau: ca. 31 sq km, and ca. 600,000 population.

“It is the world's 9th largest trading economy, with the mainland of China as its most significant trading partner” (HK government's fact sheet at http://www.gov.hk/en/about/abouthk/facts.htm, accessed June 6, 2014). Unofficially, there are plenty of fears and speculations as to what effects the opening of the pilot Free Trade Zone in Shanghai in September 2013 may have on that status, and what China's long-game might be with respect to political and economic re-integration after the 50-year period.


The Practice of Everyday Life was first published in 1980 as L'invention du quotidien: 1. Arts de faire (Gallimard).

Their inequality is apparent in the fact that the view from below lacks precisely 'perspective,' i.e. (critical) distance and grasp.

De Certeau speaks here of the production of an image, but his point generalizes easily, once ‘image’ is understood as a particular representation of space cum space of representation. Of course, the direct context of de Certeau's focus on everyday practices is Henry Lefebvre's very influential Critique of Everyday Life, and especially The Production of Space (1968/1991). Lefebvre distinguishes among perceived space (le perçu), conceived space (le conçu), and lived space (le vécu), where the first is the material space we encounter and explore with our senses, the second refers to mental constructions (representations) of space, while the third integrates both at the level of lived meanings, emotions, etc. in our daily interactions (hence, le vécu refers to a plurality of spaces of representation). De Certeau's everyday practices are especially relevant at this third level.

See Cavagna et al., 11865.

“The turn of one bird attacked by a predator has an influence not only over the neighbors directly interacting with it, but also over all birds that are correlated to it. Correlation measures how the behavioral changes of one animal influence those of other animals across the group. Behavioral correlations are therefore ultimately responsible for the group's ability to respond collectively to its environment” (Cavagna et al., 11865).

See Chapter IX (“Spatial Stories”), pp. 115-30, but esp. 118-22 (subsection on “Tours and Maps”), where he distinguishes between “the itinerary (a discursive series of operations) and the map (a plane projection totalizing observations), that is, between two symbolic and anthropological languages of space. Two poles of experience. It seems that in passing from ‘ordinary’ culture to scientific discourse, one passes from one pole to the other” (119). De Certeau's distinction, however, with its marked preference for the pole of ‘ordinary’ culture, remains problematic. Itself scientific (based on urban anthropological analyses of oral narrations), this distinction appears symptomatic of the circularity of cultural criticism as Adorno once diagnosed it: “The cultural critic is not happy with civilization, to which alone he owes his
discontent” (17).

13 Here I will be working mostly off of his *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (2006) and *Spaces of Hope* (2000).

14 See Purcell, esp. 99-101, for a review of this line of argument in a cross-section of critical discourses (geography, political economy, urban studies, etc.) on globalization as infringing on democratic processes.

15 Both are Harvey’s examples, and while he stresses the disjunction between the frameworks necessary for understanding these processes, he also points out that “Comparisons between different spatio-temporal frameworks can illuminate problems of political choice (do we favor the spatio-temporality of financial flows or that of the ecological processes they typically disrupt, for example)” (123).

16 “The *flâneur* is the creation of Paris” (SW 2: 263), Benjamin notes in “The Return of the *Flâneur*,” his review of Franz Hessel’s *Spazieren in Berlin*.

17 Foucault is a major presence in de Certeau’s book, one of the many parallels and affinities between the two thinkers being a shared antipathy towards ‘global’ theories, *e.g.* Marxism or psychoanalysis. What is important to note, however, is that their antipathy does not concern the content of psychoanalytic or Marxist analyses, their methods, or even individual categories, but rather the emphasis—very much in evidence in the 1970s in France—on the ‘scientiosity’ of such analyses: in other words, they are concerned with “the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution and functioning of an organised scientific discourse within a society such as ours” (Foucault 84). My proposal for a supplementation of de Certeau makes sense if we adjust for historical distance: Harvey’s ‘historical geographical materialism’ of Marxian inspiration—especially his theory of uneven geographical development—marks (though not alone, of course) the moment when Marxism itself returns as a ‘subjugated knowledge,’ as a welcome foil to the pretensions of scientificity and ‘inevitability’ of neoliberalist theories of the market.

18 There is both reason and rhyme to this sequence, as Harvey’s ‘historical geographical materialism’ seeks to integrate both Benjamin and Lefebvre.

19 Harvey is very fond of it, and quotes it often, most prominently in the epigraph to *Spaces of Hope*.

20 At the 1991 World Tourism Organization (WTO) Ottawa Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics, tourism was defined as: “The activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (par. 19, p. 1, of the WTO technical manual on the *Collection of Tourism Expenditure Statistics*, available online at [http://pub.unwto.org/WebRoot/Store/Shop/Infoshop/Products/1034/1034-1.pdf](http://pub.unwto.org/WebRoot/Store/Shop/Infoshop/Products/1034/1034-1.pdf), accessed June 6, 2014).


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With different goals in mind and unequal results, this is what J. Tambling and L. Lo, the authors of *Walking Macau, Reading the Baroque* (2009), set out to do.

For the historical-political context of Macau’s handover, see Porter (1999).

Spatial production takes stark forms here and quite literal: Macau stands at ca. 31 sq km currently, up from ca. 11 sq km in 1912. This near-tripling in size is due to massive post-handover and post-liberalization land reclamation projects such as the Cotai Strip, advertised as Asia’s Las Vegas, which now links the islands of Coloane and Taipa and houses the monumental casino-hotel-mall-wellness complexes The Galaxy and The Venetian.

Harvey adopts this category from Marin (1984).

Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* 163.

The closest to Macau (right across the border from it) is the Zhuhai SEZ. For the (still) fraught relationship between the two territorial units, see Edmunds (2002). The whole Pearl River Delta region, which includes Macau and Zhuhai, but also Hong Kong, Shenzhen (another SEZ, inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping himself), Dongguan, and Guangzhou, is “set to develop by 2020 into a sprawling metropolis with a population of 36 million” (Simpson 1060).

*Photo 3: Stairwell connecting the shopping and gambling floors of the Venetian, Macau. Provided by author.*


“Pop/Corn”

