

## **Settling the concepts: unsettling spaces**

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Reflection on two keynote lectures of the conference  
UNSETTLED – Urban routines, temporalities and  
contestations (29 – 31 March 2017, Vienna, Austria)

Mustafa Dikeç: Urban temporalities: a view from nineteenth-  
century Paris

Sophie Watson: Assembling multiculturalism in unsettled  
times

For me these two lectures foremost raised the question of positionality of researchers in regard to the (un)settled conceptualisations of time and space.

Mustafa's lecture placed focus on the settling of the new time regime at the end of the nineteenth century in Paris. His argument intertwined the process of settling certain temporalities with spaces and routines of everyday life.

Sophie's lecture engaged in the theme of multiculturalism as a research and lived practice which can counteract discourses and practices of exclusion, othering and hostility towards that other.

And in so doing they have engaged the paradox of researching cities. To quote Sophie, "there is no one narrative that can ever make sense of cities, which are instead heterogeneous, shifting and unsettled terrains embedded in ever changing contested socio-political landscapes and routines." Yet, both lectures made the processes and practices of settling either their focus or goal.

Mustafa was concerned with social orders which are constructed through certain time-space constructions which are not natural.

Sophie's argument rethought multicultural spaces as variously understood, conceived and settled by urban theorists, urban policy makers or politicians, either in negative or inclusive terms.

I would dare to say that both lectures narrated same stories. Even though the discussed phenomena were different, the two approaches in a pretty similar manner revolved around spatialised practices of exclusion and inclusion.

Indeed, they largely built on the understanding of space and time as processes of social production.

Their shared dimension is considering urbanity as a process or practice of settling the unsettled. In so doing they conceptually tended to settling.

Sophie reminded us that cities “are always and inevitably spaces that are made and unmade, shifting across time and space, produced in the interstices and textures of everyday socio-cultural, political, economic, and material life.”

Anyway, for me the most important dimension of Mustafa’s argument is pointing to time as a socio - cultural construct. In the late nineteenth-century Paris an increasing temporal awareness was mirrored in a growing demand for precision in time on public clocks and at private homes alike.

And Sophie’s lecture has as much articulated multiculturalism as a socio-cultural construct. In regard to this she pointed to a range of discourses (rubbing along, conviviality etc.) and political strategies to refute and reframe hostile tactics and strategies.

However, an additional important aspect of Mustafa’s lecture was a depiction of time as a material product. Stuff that we tend to perceive and interpret as largely immaterial is actually very material thing, which entails significant material infrastructures. The production of time has involved factories, machinery, workers, infrastructures!

In pursuit of the consolidation of urban temporalities as the question of civic and national pride, Paris’ public clocks as well as a growing number of clocks in bourgeoisie’s homes was connected to the public time regime through a network of pneumatic tubes.

There was pneumatic time distribution in Vienna too!  
How did it actually work?

It had three components: machinery compressing air, network of pipes and clocks receiving impulses of compressed air.

You mean a system of pipes just like gas, water or internet?

Right, but this network could have not been expanded indefinitely. It was also not particularly precise, especially if you were further away from the station where pressured air was prepared and pumped.

Not precision but regularity seems to be important here! How come it was so successful? Temporal conventions are made of three parts: social order, power and conflicts. In Paris they emerged out of the needs to regulate activities - from prostitution to synchronising traffic. While large institutions (financial institutions, hotels, shops) wanted to regulate activities, in bourgeoisie homes this was the matter of gaining prestige.

This could be linked to Sophie's claim that urbanists are making multiculturalism, as she puts forward an idea of assembling the multiculturalism - how it is actively made, settled and unsettled...

According to Mustafa, the motivation for such an elaborated system of settling the new time regime could be considered from three aspects: 1. scientific quest to prove the genius of French science, always in competition with the British; 2. city's aims of gaining international prestige on the occasion of the upcoming world exhibition (we want boulevards with clocks!); 3. social changes following the Paris Commune with the articulated need for democratisation of time. There was a real obsession with this service, people were watching public clocks.

And he also added that such publicly available time regime (public clocks) also had its emancipatory moment, as workers had control over time. They could inform themselves about time, and not rely on the assertions of factory managers.

Temporal infrastructures such as this became part of everyday life. At the same time these infrastructures regulated public and private spaces. How could we use this analytical insight for the reflection on the settling of contemporary temporalities, as the technological progress has largely transformed urban rhythms? Is the modern time regime being unsettled today?

And is the dialectics between settling and unsettling productive at all for the critical analysis?

In addition to the dimensions of settling-and unsettling, Mustafa's argument introduces the dialectics between material and immaterial, socio-cultural and natural, as well as people's needs and social order.

Time is a socio-cultural product with a strong material dimension - because time is what our productivity is measured against, and as such determines or rather defines human labour.

In a similar manner, Sophie provided an ethnographic analysis of Queens Crescent in London. She talked about the making of multiculturalism, which she considers positive and good, by placing focus on its material dimensions. Similarly to Mustafa Sophie, too, placed focus of her analysis on physical space (infrastructures) and materialities of everyday life.

If I recall correctly, Queens Crescent is an area with 50% of social housing, which has over the last 10 years been increasingly gentrified. Nevertheless the image of the area remains quite negative in the press. Since 15 years ago this area has been becoming more and more tense, difficult (crime). Its materiality of a working class community to which people from around the world moved in CONFRONTED WITH nostalgia (including that of urban planners).

At the same time Sophie claims that this area is an apparent example of a growing successful multiculturalism, which would need to be looked into in more detail.

Sophie is interested in processes and practices enabling “the acquisition of habits or capacity for diverse individuals to share space with relative harmony and tolerance - variously termed conviviality, cosmopolitanism and/ or everyday multiculturalism.”

How did she address the question of materiality?

She pointed to segregated spaces of social housing. Even police claimed these spaces provide more opportunities for hiding out, escape. Negative affect and distrust emerged because of impermeable boundaries. But she also described a local shop called Frank's as a place of multicultural conviviality and rubbing along. The shop is in family ownership who live locally. When the population in the area started to change, Frank gradually pushed traditional English products out, and introduced more diverse food in his shop such as lentils, spices, sauces. His shop offered a multicultural environment not only to those who newly were coming, but also those who were there (“if Frank is ok with this change,...”)

She sees three ways to making multiculturalism, the first being the notion of habit of living with multiculturalism, with an important recognition of a shift from habit as automatic to the self-making notions, from Cartesian to Deleuzian.

This is the notion of cosmopolitan habit, habit people develop to live with differences in the city.

That's right. Second way to making multiculturalism include small acts of politics of hope grounded in everyday practices, while the third being involvement in local community events - multicultural mixing.

Sophie warned that intercultural conviviality can easily be destabilised. See terrorist attacks with one group (Muslim) being denounced.

However, urbanists concerned with everyday multiculturalism can adopt notions of assembling multiculturalism as a route to exploring and unpacking what processes and practices hold a multicultural settlement in place (or not).

Sophie calls for countering threats to multiculturalism's settlement, such as ossification and homogenised concepts of culture applied on ethnicity by dominant group based on hear-sayings, or spatialised discursive injustice, which draws on the sense of entitlement to make (negative) judgements about others, or institutional practices of regeneration that favour private developers over small businesses that provide opportunities for informal sector employment.

Sophie basically says that one learns multiculturalism through everyday life and interaction (rubbing along) with the other.

And Mustafa says that one learns time through the interaction with clocks!

Mustafa and Sophie scrutinised somewhat abstract phenomena of time and multiculturalism, respectively, as very material processes, which entail infrastructures, labour and (material) spaces of everyday life.

They both have palpably attributed material dimensions to abstract categories and have found these material dimensions in routines and infrastructures of everyday life.

This is a very important contribution to urban studies, as it points to material dimensions of any subject that we tend to approach as immaterial, such as knowledge or symbolic economies...

Routines and spaces of our everyday lives are socio-cultural constructs, which is why it matters how and what we learn!