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# **Ambient Power: Berlin's Potsdamer Platz and the Seductive Logic of Public Spaces**

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## **Introduction**

In considering the balance of writing on public spaces nowadays, especially those at the heart of the big North American and European cities, it is hard to miss the sense that something has been lost; that there has been a measured break with a more open, shared and accessible past when everyone was included, or so it seemed. Whilst the 'public' in such accounts often seems to defy clear expression, the spaces which they occupy, whether those of the street, the courtyard or the shopping centre, appear to have definitively taken on the trappings of an altogether more ordered, closed expression of power. Certain defining features recur in the charting of this passage towards a different kind of public space: those of exclusion and inaccessibility, a contrived diversity rather a real social mix, with the hard edges of chance and uncertainty ironed out by a more controlled policing of the public realm (Mitchell, 1995; 2003, Boyer, 1993; Sorokin, 1992; Davis, 1990; 1992; Fyfe, 1998; Fyfe and Bannister, 1998).

Much of this literature exhibits a North American bias, underplaying the more varied debates that have taken place in parts of mainland Europe (see, for example, Hajer, 2002; Franzen, 2002), tilting the balance of inquiry towards concerns over the so-called 'end of public space'. The reasons offered for why something of the character and the quality of public spaces in metropolitan centres has been lost are many and varied, but for the most part they tend to point in the same direction. Even if we do not join up all the economic and political dots, the privatization of public space, the intrusion of the market into the realm of public culture has seemingly done much to undermine the variety and uniqueness of urban centres. The blame for this make-over, so to speak, of public space and public culture is laid squarely at the door of commercialization, more often than not at the entrance or gateway to the ubiquitous shopping mall (Boyer, 1993; Crawford, 1992; Goss, 1993; Christopherson, 1994; Shields, 1989; Jackson, 1998).

At the risk of overstating the case, the privatization of public space is one of the most frequent ways in which the story of the contemporary city is now told and its effects have been felt culturally and politically well beyond that of the US examples which have skewed the debate. More often than not, it is how the perceived break with what is taken to be a more open, accessible public past is often explained and, in turn, lamented. In this

paper, I want to give a rather different twist to this familiar narrative of privatization, exclusion and urban closure. I want to argue, that a novel kind of commercial public space has emerged where power works in less than obvious ways, through a *logic of inclusion rather than exclusion*. In the kinds of selective public space that I have in mind, privatization is evident but not the gates that bar entry from the street, the commercialization of urban amenities takes place but without the obvious exclusion of those ‘who don’t belong’ or appear ‘out of place’. Power works, not through electronic surveillance technologies or some rule-bound logic imposed from above, but through the *experience* of the space itself, through its *ambient* qualities.

In the first part of the paper, I set down what I mean by ambient power, where the character of a place, its design, layout and inscribed social relations, invite us to use it in selective ways and, in this instance, to stage a certain kind of ‘publicness’ in a privatized space. Following that, through the superficial topography of Sony’s consumer complex at the heart of Berlin’s Potsdamer Platz, I attempt to show how the experience of the space is itself the register of power. Accessible yet closed, inclusive yet controlled, the very openness of this commercialized public space is precisely what allows consumers to be constructed through a logic of seduction. More pointedly, I hope to show how this logic is symptomatic of a style of space in the public realm where power no longer needs to be confrontational or marked out physically to be effective.

## **Open walls**

In her article, *The Mauling of Public Space*, Margaret Kohn (2001) lists many of the characteristics noted above that seem to accompany the growing private ownership of quasi-public spaces. The inability to protect oases of public openness in a privatized world is her particular concern, especially in relation to the ‘mall-ing’ of urban space as anything that remotely threatens the homogeneity of the newly privatised spaces – the homeless, aggressive beggars, pamphleteers, and such – is screened out and excluded. This is well trodden ground, but in her account of the growth of mall-style living she also notes how, over time, such developments have increasingly taken on a public character that echoes ‘past’ traits that have seemingly been lost. There is here a certain staging of openness, of internal courtyards that give the impression that they are not as closed-off as

one might at first believe, or of sidewalks and walkways that exude a sense of accessibility, even if such access remains an illusion for many.

This staging of a kind of publicness clearly has its nostalgic side and it echoes Richard Sennett's idea of public life as a performance, first outlined in his *The Fall of Public Man* (1974), but in this instance it is more about selected props than the right social script, and, as such, it is revealing for its aims and aspirations. Like Sennett, the attempt of mall-style living in the US to increasingly mimic a more diverse and heterogeneous mix of activities and uses is arguably a recognition of the fact that the vitality of cities rests upon its rich social mix. The culture of sameness that the privatization of public space has brought in its wake has now, it would seem, moved on to embrace a more diverse set of stimuli; that is, going beyond shopping and retail to include entertainment and other lifestyle-enhancing activities. Commercialized public spaces, in the US at least, are now more often designed to enable social interaction of a particular kind and to facilitate certain types of reaction to the aesthetic and recreational objects around them. This may be exaggerated, but even so, the glaring difference, perhaps rather predictably so, in such mall-style living arrangements is that the uncertain edge of the street, the disorder that Sennett believed to be so central to the vivacity of urban life, is nonetheless missing – designed out, as it were.

Kohn's analysis only goes so far in this direction, but there is more than a hint in her account that in such commercial developments the staging of a certain kind of openness and accessibility is a *necessary* illusion. It is the impression of openness that is called for, a controlled experience not a random one, where all the trappings of an excluding power remain in place, from the shadowy forms of electronic surveillance to the more physical barriers which restrict movement and prohibit entry. This is conventionally the case, as control is ultimately assumed to be exercised through some logic of exclusion. But arguably this is no longer the only way in which it is possible to stage the public character of privatized spaces. Public spaces can be controlled, yet remain open in a real, not an illusory, sense.

### *Beyond guards and gates*

We are perhaps habitually used to thinking that power in today's commercialized public spaces has to rest ultimately on some form of domination, where the choice over who enters is constrained by certain kinds of watchful power or discriminating rules of entry (Fyfe and Bannister, 1998; Graham, 1998; Koskela, 2000; McLaughlin and Muncie, 1999). Control over access through some means of filtered exclusion is the hallmark of domination in privatized public spaces, so that only the 'right kind' of strangers are encountered. If not put off by CCTV or screened walkways, then the order-imposing authority of uniformed guards can ensure whose paths cross in largely unforeseen ways in these modern urban settings. But neither domination, nor authority, as the most familiar urban registers of power, are able to stage the kind of accessibility or openness where anyone can move freely around a public setting, yet unknowingly remain subject to a form of control that is regularized, predictable and far from chaotic. As I hope to show, closure in this kind of accessible space is all about *seduction*, not domination, in the sense that our needs and wants are indulged in selective ways and also in the sense that we remain largely oblivious to the scripted nature of such open spaces. More to the point, in this relatively new type of public space, power works through *inclusion* not exclusion. As this claim may be rather puzzling to some, let me spell out a few of its more misplaced antecedents.

A little over a decade ago, Margaret Crawford (1992) wrote about 'the world in a shopping mall' and concluded that increasingly the mall in its North American guise had transcended its shopping-centre origins, in much the same way that Kohn has more recently recognized. Her particular twist, however, was to draw attention to the way that public spaces – museums, cultural centres, hotel lobbies, corporate foyers among others – had become 'mall-like', not only in their design, but also in their celebration of display and spectacle. The mix of shopping and browsing with relaxation and entertainment which characterised these spaces to varying degrees represented a shift from a purely bland logic of commercial exploitation. Whilst the imperative to consume remained her benchmark of explanation, she nonetheless acknowledged the growth of a new style of attraction and urban design: one that trod a 'thin line between invitation and exclusion'

(1992, 27). Published in an influential collection of essays entitled, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and The End of Public Space*, which set out to describe the inauthentic nature of American urbanism, the sham nature of Crawford's invitation was the obvious conclusion to draw.

Indeed, M. Christine Boyer (1993), writing about New York's privatised public spaces at much the same time, pushed the basis of this 'invitation' firmly in the direction of artifice and false imagery, grounding the new style of urban design in a landscape of illusion. For her, the 'old style' public spaces had given way to a more visually entertaining set of spatial arrangements which drew their market appeal from the 'distorted' principles of advertising. Akin to 'promotional space', she spoke about New York's newly privatized public spaces as imitating landscapes of pleasure separate from the cities more prosaic streets; spaces filled with a magical and exciting allure, yet fed on a diet of synthetic charm and fictional information. Long seen by many as little more than the manipulation of needs, Boyer translated the appeal of the then newly built sensuous and ornate courtyards, squares, gardens and atriums of places like Battery Park in Lower Manhattan, New York, as a kind of corporate programming of needs: as an anesthetized social world divorced from the 'real' public realm of difference, diversity and antagonism.

Neither Crawford, nor Boyer, as I have indicated, were alone in thinking along these lines and the thrust of their ideas clearly had strong resonances with those who believed that we were witnessing 'the end of public space'. In a review of this line of thought, Susan Christopherson (1994) drew attention to the deceitful qualities claimed by her and others to lie behind this loss of open public space.

Beneath the surface, the signal qualities of the contemporary urban landscape are not playfulness but control, not spontaneity but manipulation, not interaction but separation. The need to manage urban space and particularly to separate different kinds of people in space is a pre-eminent consideration in contemporary urban design, matched only by the ever-present requirements to gratify the egos of developers. The soft

images of spontaneity are used to disguise the hard reality of administered space.

(1994, 409)

For Christopherson, as for others, the growth of such privatised ‘spectacles’, where both the elements of display and openness are deemed illusory, constructs a ‘public’ whose autonomy is eclipsed ‘in favour of a public realm deliberately shaped as urban theatre. Significantly, however, it is theatre in which a pacified public basks in the grandeur of a carefully orchestrated corporate spectacle’ (Crilley, 1993, 153). And those ineligible to appear in the cast are excluded by fortress-like entrances, secured walkways, CCTV systems and private security guards. What, for Christopherson, is different about urban developments in the 1990s, however, is that the control is more impersonal, less obtrusive, concealed, or more accurately, congealed, in the design. Rather than explore the ambiguity inherent in such an observation, however, she falls back on technology and design as a tool of manipulative deception, where the public seem to amount to little more than passive, cultural dupes, fooled in some way by forces of power that are never quite revealed. Not everyone at the time saw it quite as stark as that, however.

Jon Goss (1993), for instance, recognised the *broad indeterminacy* of the design arrangements in newly privatized public spaces and the fact that the public is often fully aware of its suggestive and contrived nature. As such, people may simply overlook the latter to use the space for their own purposes or walk away from the attractions shown. Whilst he did not follow through this line argument to consider the possibility of refusal or indifference among consumers in the metropolitan malls, falling back himself upon a simple ‘manipulation of needs’ argument, he did also recognise that those people who willingly place themselves in such spaces may find themselves subject to a form of control simply by following their own wants and desires. For him, though, despite his awareness of the ‘pull’ of such spaces, he could not extract himself from a logic of domination and manipulation.

For my part, it is time to think again about some of these misplaced understandings of power. Despite their purchase, they were always partial and it is perhaps an appropriate moment to redress the balance. The staging of publicness nowadays is not



about the sedation of the middle classes, if indeed it ever was, but it is about the production of certain affects which enable people to experience a place as open, accessible and inclusive – and to act meaningfully within it. There is nothing akin to cultural duping involved in this process; rather, as I hope to show, seduction as a mode of power works through curiosity, redirecting attention along lines that are already present. It is a modest form of power which, in mall-like spaces, works through the suggestive pull of the design and layout, offering choices around movement and patterns of interaction, yet at the same time limiting those very same movements and interactions in broadly scripted ways.

My point, quite simply, is that the openness of such public spaces is not illusory, but it is harder to pin down precisely because it is something that is *felt* through the invitation to mingle, circulate and inhabit. In these more open, forgiving public spaces, one could be excused for thinking that power is largely absent from the movements and interactions, but that is mainly because power is usually equated with the marked presence of physical or social barriers. When the form of power exercised has an *unmarked presence*, it is the manner in which the space itself is experienced that is the expression of power. Put another way, in such spatial arrangements possibilities are closed down by degree through its ambient qualities.

### *Ambient power*

By *ambient power*, I mean that there is something about the character of an urban setting – a particular atmosphere, a specific mood, a certain feeling – that affects how we experience it and which, in turn, seeks to induce certain stances which we might otherwise have chosen not to adopt. There is a certain quality about such settings, or qualities, which show themselves in such a way as to *both* encourage *and* inhibit how we move around, use and act within them. The urban public spaces that I have in mind are not ‘theatrical spaces’ consumed passively by those who happen to pass through them, nor are they spectacular in the sense of being spaces of deception or trickery. They are, by and large, the ordinary spaces of the shopping centre, the market and the plaza in which people act out, much in the way that Sennett described (1974, 2000), their roles of impersonal sociability in public settings. Crucially, however, such spaces are designed to

bring about an affective response (see Anderson, forthcoming; McCormack, 2003; Thrift, 2004; Amin and Thrift, 2002), a way of being that can evoke a feeling of openness and inclusiveness. What goes on in such spaces, how they are used, is circumscribed by the design, layout, sound, lighting, solidity, and other affective means that can have an impact which is difficult to isolate, yet nonetheless powerful in their incitements and limitations on behaviour.

For me, what this conjures up is not some overblown corporate strategy of manipulation, but rather a more provisional, *phenomenological* sense of power that intentionally sets out to convey a particular form of publicness. Whether compelling or not, the meanings embodied in these commercialized public settings work on the senses to bring about certain responses, predispositions and forms of engagement. This involves more than simply our sensory perception of things like colour, melody or scent, no matter how harmonious or redolent a place may be, rather it takes us into the realm of designs that are evocative of unrestricted, navigable spaces, where a mix of activities is suggested by the dramaturgical possibilities and defined uses. Overall, the qualities of the space, both symbolic and material are remindful of an ideal of public space that has never quite been, but is no less powerful for that. Whilst it does not evoke the ‘eyes and ears’ of Jane Jacob’s street scenes, the phenomenological imprint is one of an urban experience where it is possible to bump into others different from oneself or at least not quite the same.

The sense of power is phenomenological in so far as it is right there in front of you, not concealed in its manipulative intent, but on the surface, so to speak. There is nothing hidden from view, no phenomena round and about the place that obscures a deeper, more duplicitous set of motives. All in all, the symbols and the signs, the uses and the practices, the cues and the prompts, are given to us as they are, for us to apprehend. Yet whilst much of what is around us may appear superficial and the feelings they evoke seem familiar, that does not mean that their significance is obvious. Whether we invoke Husserl or Heidegger or the likes of Merleau-Ponty, that is one of the key insights of phenomenology – that our experiences are *had*, not known – that they come about through our involvement in a world that is ready-to-hand (see Pickles, 1985). We are

affected by how we experience different urban settings, whether we know it or not.

Ambience, in this respect, is felt before it is understood.

To press the point a little further, as Jonathan Rée (2000) has shown, we do not piece together our experience of something by adding up the stimuli received from the five senses or by simply believing what we first see, hear or touch. You can be aware of how accessible or affable a place is without relying upon one or other of the senses to pinpoint the impression. How you find your bearings in a shopping mall, perhaps for the first time, may owe little to your sense of spatial awareness. If you feel encouraged to move and mix freely in what seems like a generous space, you may do so without isolating any particular sensation. Similarly, if your movements feel inhibited by what you see immediately around you, the anxiety felt may not be related to how physically close others are to you. How you grasp your surroundings is likely to be more the result of your, as yet, unprocessed feelings than it is of any particular layout, lighting arrangement or background noise.

Having said that, the affect that publicness can have upon us when a form of it is staged in commercial arenas is not a univocal one and nor does it come with guarantees. Peter Jackson (1998) in his account of the contested spaces of two north London malls reminds us that there is no experience which is not mediated by background, culture and use. There is no overarching experience or singular response to the cues, prompts and encoded meanings inscribed in urban settings, whether intentional or otherwise. Equally, however, there are limitations as to what can be broadly experienced in terms of the possibilities that can be closed down, the choices that can be curtailed and the interaction that can be restricted. It is one thing to acknowledge that experience is always mediated, it is quite another to suggest that responses to the same setting are endlessly multiple and distinct from one another. Ambient settings are of a *pattern* and so too are our responses to them.

With that in mind, I now want to turn my attention to a commercialized public space that lies at the heart of the welter of reconstruction that has altered much of Berlin's skyline since reunification in 1989, the Sony Centre on Potsdamer Platz. The Japanese Corporation's triangular 26,500 m<sup>2</sup> site is of interest, not especially because it represents

the company's new European headquarters, but because the forum at its core represents a certain kind of publicness in a staged private setting that is at odds with many of its mall-like predecessors: where in this instance the experience of the space is the primal expression of power.

### **The Sony Centre on Potsdamer Platz**

Controversial from the outset, the Potsdamer Platz development in the 1990s touched a raw nerve among those who believed that Berlin's latest reconstruction should hark back to a more sober, Prussian tradition of architecture and design that would appease the 'city fathers'. Modern in its steel and glass high rise design, the Sony Centre in particular attracted bitter criticism from those who denounced it for drawing its architectural cues from the North American mall-style tradition (see Figure 1). Whilst it is not Battery Park in New York or the West Edmonton Mall, it does have a corporate imprint that leaves no one in doubt that this is a fully-fledged private development, parts of which are open and freely accessible to the public. In many ways, the whole setting is a 'branded space', obviously in terms of the fact that it houses Sony's European HQ, but also as a display case for the company's products: through its IMAX 3D theatre, eight-screen cinema block, style store and the Berlin Filmhaus. In contrast to its neighbouring development, the Debis quarter, which houses the headquarters of the Daimler Chrysler Corporation, there is no attempt to tone down or conceal this corporate projection. It is a Sony space through and through, and yet at its focal centre, around which Sony's glass and steel structures are grouped, is an inner plaza that has the *feel* of a public space.

The forum, or plaza, is not screened off from the surrounding streets or teeming with the latest surveillance devices which follow your every move, and neither is it a setting for contrived diversity where strangers are somehow exorcised from the scene. The broad



**Figure 1: Sony's 24 -storey tower at Potsdamer Platz.**

entrances from the street, in themselves full-height passages, are not gated or manned. Moreover, they open out onto a generous space of bars, restaurants and seating in which Sony's IMAX, its cinemas and style store, as well as other consumer offerings, frame the setting, leaving open the possibility to relax, loiter, indulge or walk through without commercial inhibition. In many respects, the plaza is a deliberate echo of the peculiar hold that Potsdamer Platz has on the 1920s Berlin popular imagination: a place of bustling urban life pulsating with movement and interaction that followed on from the fact that it was the city's busiest intersection (Czaplicka, 1990; Caygill, 1997). Remembered more for its vitality than its seediness, this iconic slice of the area's history was seized upon by Sony's project partners, the development group, Tishman Speyer, and translated into a modern version of so-called animated urbanity.

In this self-styled, branded space of urban life, however, what holds the public and private together in Sony's plaza is not an aggressive policing of difference or an imposed vitality, but rather the supple forces of *seduction*.

#### *Powered by inclusion*

Seduction, as I see it, is an instrumental mode of power primed to shape and mould the will of the many whilst allowing individuals the possibility of opting out (see Allen, 2003). Its register is not so much the psychoanalytical orchestration of desire or the

structuring of social divides between consumer and non-consumer (along the lines envisaged by Bauman (1987, 1988)), as it is the suggestion of possibilities. It works in a quite unpretentious way through enticement and encouragement, directing our sensibilities along certain lines and not others. As Lipovetsky (1994) has pointed out, seduction involves the exploitation of embryonic tastes that are already present by increasing their appeal to those involved. It draws in people by suggesting this rather than that option, and turning an apparently open-ended situation to particular advantage. A seductive presence, in that sense, is apparent from the combination of suggestive practices, experiences and spaces laid out for temptation. In open urban spaces like Sony's forum, what goes on within it, how people move and interact, is arguably closed down by degree – by a process of inclusion rather than exclusion.

The plaza itself, as stated earlier, acts as a kind of exhibition complex for the entertainment wares of Sony PLC – from Sony Play Stations and online movies to all manner of electronic wizardry – effectively branding the space as a lively, entertaining place to be. The nature of the indulgence is superficial, seeking to take advantage of attitudes and tastes among consumers. Once in the plaza, however, there is no overt pressure to consume; rather the place works through an atmosphere of detachment, much like any urban street or square, yet at the same time the space provides a glimpse of what else may be absorbed or consumed. To move through the plaza is to find oneself subject to a power whose imprint is decidedly modest, where spontaneity and impulsiveness are the pulling force, redirecting attention to one or more of the attractions on offer, be it the chance to play the latest software game, explore a piece of German film history, prop up one of the bars, or simply take in the cathedral-like scale of the place. Seduction in this context is a brief form of power: it may lead to greater sales for Sony PLC or it may not, it may find that its cues and prompts are heeded or that they are consciously overlooked. It is impossible for Sony to know in advance whether the plaza's style of ambience is effective as a commercial distraction. Whilst the forum is conceived as a whole, a range of choices are provided to incorporate the varied tastes of the circulating public in a sort of hit-or-miss way.

But, and this is an important but, although there is no direct or covert steer to indulge in a certain way or relax through some form of entertainment, that does not mean to say that the choices are endless and the number of possible interactions infinite. Cravings and wants are indulged in very selective ways, peoples' choices are limited and their tastes and predispositions met by a restricted range of possibilities – all of which can be anticipated in advance and calculable to a certain degree. Walking through the plaza, you may stop and sit by the central fountain on the seating made available, simply to get your bearings, yet find yourself curious about, say, the style store opposite you or perhaps notice for the first time the Filmhaus and its attractions in your line of sight (see Figures 2 and 3). You are made to feel aware of the possibilities that surround you, simply by inhabiting the space. Everything is accessible, or rather a limited assortment of attractions are ready-to-hand, and what excesses obtain are intentional, not hidden from view or out of sight. Quite simply, the surface meaning of the different styles of entertainment reveal themselves for what they are: just different kinds of pleasure, recreation and indulgence. You can find yourself doing something you might otherwise not have done, simply because you are there. Seduction as a mode of power, in that sense, works through proximity and inclusion.



**Figure 2: The Sony style store, right; The Berlin Filmhaus, centre, edging the Forum**



**Figure 3: Inside the Sony style store**

Interestingly, the space works in this superficial way, I suspect, because, somewhat paradoxically, it is not a straightforward commercial setting. True, it is a branded space, yet arguably it does not quite *feel* like one. When Margaret Crawford or M. Christine Boyer talk about corporate spectacles, festival market places and their like, they appear to have in mind privatized public spaces that represent a cross between corporate advertising sites and highly profitable commercial outlets. The bottom line is direct sales and profit. Sony's forum, however, seems to be more about an emergent *economy of affect*, rather than the more familiar economy of commodity sales and profits. It is as if it is the *experience* of the space itself which provides the commercial offering and only indirectly the durable goods and corporate software on display.

By economy of affect, I mean that the range of enticements and the variety of activities laid out for temptation in the plaza are all part of what may be understood as the diffuse marketing of Sony as a sensual event. What you see, hear and touch as you move around the forum, perhaps stopping to check the films currently showing, browsing at the music available, catching the sound of a familiar soundtrack or simply gazing up at the bold tent-like roof structure which seems to hover over the plaza, may all appear rather insubstantial gestures, yet overall produce a positive association between the feelings experienced and the assemblage of things that is Sony. The diffusion of Sony across a space that appears almost to be at pains *not* to be equated with a consumption spectacle



relies, in this instance, on the experience being grasped instinctively rather than through, say, a programme of blanket conditioning or prepackaged needs, as some would have it (see Pryke, 2002).

As such, the hit-or-miss nature of seduction is readily apparent. Yet in the case of the Sony forum, it may have more to do with the construction of a more general type of commercial subject, rather than one tied to the direct purchase of Sony merchandise. It is hard to say, but the kind of exposure to the range of sensory associations possible in the arena may broadly reinforce a preference for one brand of goods over another which may or may not be reflected in future sales and profits. Either way, the experience is intended to be a positive one, allowing those present to be emotionally attuned to their surroundings and open to its ambience. Crucially, however, there is nothing illusory or cynically manipulative about this arrangement, such qualities are part of the broad indeterminacy of what is to be in the plaza, even though the choices are limited and the desires numbered.

### *Seducing the public*

For all this talk about the seductive logic of Sony's commercial trappings, however, its effectiveness as an instrumental mode of power arguably owes just as much to the seductive public 'feel' of the forum, as it does to any redirection of curiosity or temptation involved. In part, the forum's seductiveness as a space stems from its staged openness and accessibility. As noted earlier, however, it is easy to slip into a certain rhetoric of urban design which considers the staged publicness of private commercial spaces as nothing more than artifice: namely, spaces which are cut-off from the surrounding street life, enclosed within forbidding glass walls, inward looking, divided by 'street architecture', and policed at a high level of security. Such managed spaces are seen to have little in common with anything that is 'really' public. That may be so in some cases, but Sony's forum shows that it is possible to *both* stage publicness in a different way *and* control it through means other than physical or technological surveillance.

The forum, some 4000m<sup>2</sup> in area, is accessible from four gaping entrances that draw you into a light, airy, uncluttered space that seems almost self-conscious in its

spaciousness (see Figure 4). Even the expansive entrances, which reach up to the tent-like roof structure, seem to demand your attention, yet curiously not in a forthright monumental manner. All of this, it would appear, is quite intentional on the part of the developers and architect. According to Tishman Speyer, Sony's project partner, this roomy, composed space is designed to be 'an urban communication space in a modern form ... it is not only an entertainment space, it is a private space, but publicly open'. It has been designed with a certain image of publicness in mind, one where people can mingle, circulate and loiter in a way that it is possible to encounter others who are not like you, without having to feel an obligation to share your life history with them. That peculiar blend of impersonality and inclusiveness in open spaces, much idealized by social theorists and architects alike, feels as if it has been 'hard-wired' into the design of the forum so that those passing through reach some kind of self-understanding as to the nature of the space that they are in and act appropriately within it. Whether this self-understanding has been realized by those who mill around in this ample space is a moot point, yet the social activity encouraged and enabled by the layout and design of the plaza suggest that this is more than simply 'dead public space'.



**Figure 4: The Forum's roof structure, entrances and central plaza**

What Sennett (1974) had in mind when he coined this expression was the type of street level plazas or squares which, whilst open and accessible, are merely places to

move through, to cut across rather than dwell in or engage with in any meaningful way. Draughty, sterile, primed with seating designed to move you on, little, according to Sennett, punctuates these vast, empty ‘public’ caverns other than the sight of people on their way to somewhere else. But Sony’s plaza, despite its capacious feel and obvious accessibility, is not designed simply with the function of motion in mind. There is, it would seem, an intent in the design for the enactment of a certain kind of social relations: the encouragement to hang around, to watch others engage the space, to indulge in what is on offer, to mix shopping with browsing, curiosity with leisure. People tend to mill around in twos and threes, of all ages, a mix of out-of-towners, tourists, and Berliners (but few curious young ones it would seem). The experience may not reach the romantic heights of urban sensibility that Sennett continuously returns to in his writings, as some kind of absolute benchmark, but it does aim to seduce the public into recognizing the plaza as a space for them to engage with, rather than pass through.

In much the same way, as argued earlier, that the experience of the space itself provides the commercial offering, so too does that experience operate as a practice of inclusion: encouraging people to value the space, to move around freely, to take in the surroundings and to respond to the many visual and social cues. The suggestive pull of the layout and design of the plaza, the feeling of openness inscribed in the space, has a seductive presence, one that plays on existing understandings about what is and what is not a public space. The allusion to the street scenes of the 1920s does not make the modern-day plaza at Potsdamer Platz an urban palimpsest, but the new inscription does increase the appeal for an inclusive space that once was in the German popular imagination. The invitation to recognize the publicness of the space and to act meaningfully within it are all part of the plaza’s seductive trappings.

As always with seduction, however, the invitation can be declined, the characteristics of the space can go unrecognized and, more pointedly, people can opt out from the experience. They can walk away. Choice is built into this powerful arrangement, but what is often overlooked is that so too is restriction, curtailment and closure.

Whilst the movements and interactions of the browsing public are random, people nonetheless appear to move around the plaza in more or less *scripted* ways, enticed by

the attractions to be sure, but also by the cartography of openness, offset by the position of the tall entrances situated around the rim of the plaza. Visitors seem to move this rather than that way, tend to walk in one direction rather than another, as if they were responding to the invitations and suggestions inscribed in the design and layout. There is a certain rhythm to the group movements, little that is bustle and much that is leisurely, but all of a similar pattern. Yet the control of movement cannot be attributed to any orchestrated pacing of the attractions or the use of floor patterns to suggest pathways (see Goss, 1993), for neither device is encoded in the design of the plaza. Rather than spatial manipulation, closure in this kind of accessible space works through a particular logic of seduction where not only are the needs and wants of those present indulged in selective ways, but also their sense of publicness is exploited so that they bring themselves to order in what is a seemingly familiar setting. Without the usual measures of social control and spatial exclusion – CCTV, uniformed staff, behaviourist principles of design and such – power works through the experience of the space itself, through its inclusive ambience.

### **Power's unmarked presence**

Let me be clear about the nature of my argument here. I do not wish to claim that in all commercialized public space power operates more or less along the lines that I have described here. There is something very particular about the way that publicness is staged within Sony's forum in Berlin which distinguishes it from many other mall-like spaces dotted throughout North America and beyond. Equally, however, I do not think that the unmarked ways in which power closes down options through an inclusive logic at Potsdamer Platz is especially novel or unique. It is possible to conceive of how a seductive presence has been in operation elsewhere, in similar spaces where people act in ways that they might otherwise not have done, yet attribute such actions to the more overbearing forces of domination and the manipulation of needs. When a central part of the argument is that the openness of places like Sony's plaza is not illusory, however, and that it is *felt* through the ambient qualities of such a space, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that is harder to apprehend and indeed, for some, to comprehend. There is less that is tangible or marked to show the imbalance of power and who is plainly doing what to whom.

But, as I have had cause to note, not all brushes with power are as obvious or as raw as that. Indeed, one of the key insights of phenomenology is that it reminds us that much of what we take for granted is less straightforward than we might commonly suppose. Sometimes our familiarity with the likes of open, inclusive, accessible spaces such as the forum at Potsdamer Platz may blind us as to their significance, especially when the space in question is actually privatized. It is not that the true significance of such spaces is hidden from view, but rather that we are often too close to notice how our sense of publicness has been appropriated and used to bring about an effective response. The trappings that we find ourselves in the midst of may perhaps seem too obvious to bear scrutiny, but it is their very familiarity which stops us from probing them in the firstplace.

In the case of Sony's forum, it would have been possible, even easier perhaps, to fall back on to the sort of explanation favoured by the likes of Goss and others by talking about the 'contrived spaces' of the plaza or, following Sharon Zukin's (1995) lead, its 'domestication'. The latter term, picked up by others such as Jackson (1998) and Atkinson (2003), has been used to describe a process akin to the taming of expectations and behaviour in public spaces, so that the rough edges of urbanity are designed-out and assumptions about who can use the space are altered by the improvement of the facilities and better security measures. In short, the 'purification' of privatised public spaces and the exclusion of those who are not the white, middle class majority is achieved by securing uniformity through domestication.

Domestication, in the respect, works by making public spaces attractive to certain users but not others, primarily by 'softening' the landscape, opening it up to more sedate forms of recreation whilst policing the whole process by a range of security measures, from private guards to electronic surveillance cameras. An established notion of 'civility' is expressed through the re-designed layout and amenities, with carefully selected attractions on offer, so that they will appeal to 'normal' users rather than the decidedly troublesome and less civil ones. Zukin was observing the redesign of New York's public parks by voluntary, private groups, whereas Jackson was commenting on the popularity of certain north London shopping malls amongst certain users which had been achieved by 'reducing the risks of social difference and promoting the virtues of familiarity' (1998,

180). In both instances there is a strong thread of managed or contrived diversity that harks back to mall-type themes, with perhaps the relationship between design and policing now receiving a more balanced treatment in the sought after goal of achieving urban closure around a certain public.

Potsdamer Platz, however, is neither a uniform public space, nor one carefully contrived to differentiate it from the surrounding street life and its unpredictable encounters. That may change over time, but at present it is not a 'purified' space. It is, as I have stressed, a controlled space, but it is not one that operates through the imposition of behaviourist protocols, suburban values and managed diversity, not to mention sophisticated surveillance technologies.

Domestication, in this sense, is yet another version of an excluding power, rather than one which works through the more subtle means of inclusion. It is essentially about using urban design techniques to 'keep' certain kinds of 'less civil' elements out. As an account of what is happening to public spaces nowadays, rather like 'the end of public space' argument in general, it rests loosely upon the assumption that there once was a public space which included everyone. That there are many publics, not one, is now perhaps more widely recognized (as indeed does Zukin, 1995; see also Deutsche, 1996; Bridge and Watson, 2000; Warner, 2002; Weintraub and Kumar, 1997) and Sony's public at Potsdamer Platz is no more or less exclusive than many others. It is its staged version of publicness, however, which sets it apart from the mall-like stereotypes, not its public per se.

In this respect, the usual political noises about the lack of democratic access and public accountability in the newly privatized public spaces are somewhat besides the point. The ideal of urban sociability in public spaces where diverse others are encountered in unpredictable ways is one thing; the staging of a certain kind of accessibility and openness at Potsdamer Platz where anyone may enter and move around freely, yet remain subject to a form of control that is regularized, is quite another. The unmarked presence of power in commercialized settings like Sony's forum in Berlin, which works on unformulated feelings to bring about a certain response and style of engagement, does, it would seem, *efface* the distinction between inclusion and exclusion

as it is conventionally understood in mainstream urban studies. When the experience of being in a particular setting does itself become the register of power, then perhaps it is time to ask ourselves new questions about the nature of power and control in public spaces.

## **Conclusion**

In stressing that power in privatized public spaces does not always have to take a raw, physical form, where presence is barred by guards or gates or controlled by surveillance measures, I run the risk of playing down such commonplace techniques. I do not wish to suggest, however, that they are not a significant feature of the urban landscape, through which power is exercised in more or less manifest ways. Rather, what I have set out to show is that there is more to the exercise of power in public places than simply the obvious, signposted arrangements. In the case of the Sony Centre on Potsdamer Platz, as I see it, power is exercised through a seductive spatial arrangement, where the experience of being in the space is itself the expression of power. Choices are restricted, options are curtailed and possibilities are closed down by degree through the forum's ambient qualities. How far other developers, or corporations for that matter, have recognized that control in privately owned public spaces can be achieved without gates or overt forms of exclusion is not altogether clear. Certainly the domestication of public spaces may involve a cruder form of ambient control, yet it is rarely without an accompanying form of brash exclusion. For my part, however, it is the *quieter, more impalpable registers of power* that now play a more significant part in the constitution of public spaces and which deserve our attention.

Power is always exercised in particular ways, it is never power in general, even when it is in your face. Seduction, as an inclusive force, may run alongside visual displays of authority or in tandem with more watchful forms of surveillant power in public spaces. Or its forms of enticement, suggestion and inclusion may more or less constitute the tangled arrangements of power in place, which give somewhere like Potsdamer Platz its expression, shape and character. The fact that such a force may appear insubstantial or superficial in its trappings should not lead us to conclude that those placed on the receiving end, so to speak, are not subject to its control. Because it

works through incitement and affect to limit behaviour, does not make it any less powerful as an instrument of constraint than more concealed forms such as manipulation and pretence.

To that end, there is nothing illusory about seductive arrangements of power in urban public settings. The staging of a certain kind of ‘publicness’ in privatized spaces is not a false spectacle; the openness and accessibility are real, as is the closure and the constraint that accompanies it. Talk about ‘the end of public space’ in that sense is misguided, not only because of the fact that there are many publics, not one, but also because the distinction between inclusion and exclusion can no longer be drawn as a hard-edged line of power. Parts of our cities no longer operate according to such a forbidding logic. More subtle, but no less insidious, registers of power are, it would seem, increasingly part of the urban fabric.

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