



CAPITAL SPACE AND GLOBAL CONSUMPTION

Abstract:

This paper will discuss the relationship between brands and spaces. As advertisers struggle to capture consumers' attention from traditional advertising campaigns, advertisers have begun relying more heavily on brands to engage the consumer with experiences. These brands have made their way into the public and private spaces where citizens live. This paper will attempt to answer the following question, to what extent can spaces be branded? This question is becoming increasingly more important to understand as the consumer society continues to grow rapidly around the globe. The paper will dive deeper into the impacts of advertising in public spaces.

Furthermore, the paper will look at how spaces are used as advertising platforms where brands can entangle themselves into the daily experiences of consumers. Beyond real private and public spaces, the paper will briefly discuss the issues surrounding digital space and physical space. By looking at recent research regarding advertising in public and private spaces, brand experiences, and socio-political issues in advertising, this paper will give the reader reasons to care about the cultural dimensions of advertising. This infiltration of brands, and more generally capitalism is a topic concerning all spaces. On either ends of the scale this is relevant; from the micro spaces of the home, to the macro spaces of the globe. As spaces continue to fill with brands, societies ability to disconnect from consumer society will become increasingly complex, leaving little space for raw culture and natural social engagement to occur. From the political paradigm, public spaces become consumer spaces as brands entangle themselves into the fabric of daily life. From the social side, private spaces are altered to highlight brands and consumerism in life. Lastly, the cultural concern is that the expansion of branded spaces directly compresses public space where authentic culture is curated. This paper will summarize capital space and global consumption while giving the reader an opportunity to understand what influences the space they engage with daily.

Introduction:

Any space that holds meaning is branded, which presents grand problems. Primarily, this perpetual branding of space is caused by capitalism, which extends beyond the direct reach of advertising. The capital control over public and private spaces is the focus of this paper. Capital control extends into, not only the culture and urban landscapes of global cities, but also the individual mobile private spheres and global spaces of consumption and production. Furthermore, this paper will discuss branded spaces that have entangled themselves into local neoliberal government policies that permit “free” urban structures provided by private capital. These “free” structures along with other “free” products and services are provided under the condition that the space surrounding them promotes consumption and capital, a concept that will be expanded on from the political perspective. This paper will also illustrate how branded spaces in social spaces engage with everyone’s experience. Finally, the struggle between culture and brands in the attention economy will be analysed as cultural spaces curate authenticity temporarily before brands unsustainably consume the authentic spaces culture creates.

Capitalism and Space

Modern capitalism affects multiple aspects of contemporary life; from city planning to major holidays, capital is almost omnipresent. It is nearly impossible to spend a day without engaging with capital. Capital doesn’t only shape the urban structures of cities, but also the people who prosper and perish within its virtual walls. This capital invasion can primarily be explained by two questions; how production and consumption are organized through space, and how social relations struggle in that space. Take for example the Greater Vancouver area, where the Fraser Valley and the Burrard Inlet serve as valuable production orientated spaces, while the glowing city, urban surroundings and expansive suburban spaces are tailored towards

consumption. Furthermore, this spatial model can be extracted to a global scale where developed countries primarily consume in their national space; while, the third world countries primarily produce within their borders. All this can be explained by the capital priorities set by western power.

For centuries, the west has ruled the world with their policies and cultural ideologies slowly seeping into the foundation of all cultures; and leading the way is consumption and capital. The social relations that unfold through consumption and production in space are illustrated where the wealthy allocate their resources. Take for example, the global transportation industry and the global food industry. The space these two industries occupy globally is significant. The capital supporting cars driven today versus the public transit rail systems dreamt of in the past illustrate how the transportation space is tailored towards the neoliberal individualize regime that promotes more consumption in personal spaces. This is supported by the idea of individual liberty that has been heavily advertised with one message, consume freedom; for example, scooters in Europe or muscle cars in America. As for the food industry, capital provides consumers with the choices of supermarkets, but these choices are heavily censored by the store's layout and profitability of products. Unfortunately for consumers, they can't vote with their dollars in the grocery store because all food options are not available. For the average urban consumer, their food market is highly saturated in salt, sugar, and fat because capital dominates the space, the brands, and the social relationship within this private space. No longer are local fresh markets the norm; rather, in the globalized world market space is saturated with the most profitable food ingredients.

Another example of how capital affects space is seen in global cities. The abundance of consumption orientated spaces in global cities has shaped Hong Kong, Beijing and New York to

all slight mutation of each other. Each city has their own unique brand, but all the city's space has been designed for advertisement and consumption. The global cities are so similar in space design that certain scholars are suggesting these globalized cities are creating a new citizen, the transnational citizen; in consequence, these highly structured spaces will soon see transnational public service advertisements because of the ubiquity of space amongst cities (Lewis S. W., 2012).

Within the macro space design of cities are large transit networks. With numerous stations and miles of track, the infrastructures are “potentially influential new locations for social interaction,” (Lewis S. W., 2012). As urban development continues to overtake traditional public spaces, the people generally found socializing in public space are push into branded spaces. For example, commercial shopping centers attached to subways networks, where advertisements bombard them like Vancouver's Granville Street Station. From mall announcements to window displays the citizen's audio and visual stimuli are saturated with one message, consume constantly.

However, the over saturation of advertising in public spaces has caused capitalism and its branded spaces to adapt in the global attention economy. In consequence, as advertisers struggle to find audience attention online the capital flow has been redirected towards “the increasing[ly] significant city public space” (Iveson, 2011). Through billboards and outdoor city furniture the advertisers have penetrated public space in the name of capitalism grossly expanding branded spaces in the process.

Furthermore, this shift in capital flow can be explained by the “neoliberal logics and practices of urban governance,” (Iveson, 2011). As local governments establish public-private partnerships they lose control of the urban space. On the one side, the government rejoices in this

opportunity to lift the burden of infrastructure maintenance costs from their budgets while giving the public new “free” benches and bus shelters; however, this results in more advertising and more space directly controlled by capital. A great example of how capital has controlled public space is in Venice where Mayor Massimo Cacciari “announced plans to allow digital billboards to be erected in the iconic Piazza San Marco. Faced with mounting bills for restoration of the piazza.” (Iveson, 2011). This example proves the extent to which capital controls space and continues to invade public space where culture is unquestionably curated. In Massimo Cacciari statement to the press he stated. “it is neither ugly nor beautiful simply necessary. We are forced to move in this way because we have limited resources. We need to take care of the buildings and monuments that make up the artistic beauty of Venice, but to do so we need a hand, and the city's cultural authorities are looking for sponsors.” (Iveson, 2011). This digital display in Venice is a prime example of how capital is mobilized in a neoliberal society to relieve government duties, and control space through sponsorship or more bluntly advertising. These sponsorships promote the consumption culture that capital continues to control.

Even though the present price for this capital stimulus may seem reasonable, cultural authorities should be weary of the long term cultural implications of digital screens in cultural public space. The perceived free benefits of attention supported public infrastructure impacts the access to the media landscape for those who lack the abundance of resources controlled by the wealthy capitalist. Public art is replaced by hipster art, and historic squares are literally branded by sponsors.

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However, from the consumer’s perspective the free access to global information and discount goods with remarkable convenience is spectacular. The consumer is delighted by the act

of consumption, but disregards completely the production of the information and goods they habitually consume daily. Capital has effectively branded consumption spaces by hiding unappealing production spaces half way across the globe. The approval of individual consumption in the private space reinforces the social relationships of space. That is, consumption can be safely practiced in private; however, upon entering the public sphere advertisements bombard citizen consumers as they attempt to engage with public spaces. In consequence, the consumers alter their attention to shield their stimuli from adverts by privatizing the public space through the utilization of technology. With this sense of control, the consumer disengages with the overly branded real public space and takes their attention elsewhere, such as online through various mobile platforms. The book *Public Space, Media Space* suggests that, “consumers often expect, feel comfortable with and desire to avoid direct interpersonal communication whilst out in public.” (Berry, Harbord, & Moore, 2013). This sheltering effects causes the public sphere to lose its appeal while “neutralizing the public spaces of the city” (Berry, Harbord, & Moore, 2013). In consequence, this causes citizen to remain unengaged with the public sphere, while the branded private spaces flourish.

The engagement that once thrived in the public sphere is now found in the branded mobilized private sphere. A space previously exclusive to WiFi Hotspots, the mobile private sphere has now expanded to shelter consumers from one tangible brand space to expose them to a virtual brand space. However, the mixture of globalized audiences and free information in the virtual branded space has created an instant struggle for attention that capital is fights for. This explains why, “the advertising industry has been the main promoter for media architecture development, bringing creative and unique installations to life and providing new expressions for urban public spaces,” (Andreea, 2013) because the advertising industry is the spokesperson for capitalism and

consumption. This leads to more virtual media space that can quickly adapt to consumers' demand for unique spaces, and more advertising that subtly "changes social behaviors and public space consumption" (Andreea, 2013). From this point of view, it is not difficult to see how "futuristic images of the city from movies like Blade Runner (1982) or Minority Report (2002) are resembling reality more and more." (Andreea, 2013). The cause of this shift in attention and engagement is largely capital in nature; however, the branded spaces that follow capital have political implications too.

The Political Side of Space:

The political side of space is heavily orientated around the discussion of public space. This public space that used to be filled with political banter has been rapidly changing into consumer space because the attention desired by advertisers and the capital cannot be obtain in the saturated spaces. Therefore, capital has begun to double down on public space by going to the government and exploiting valuable city space at a pathetic price. During the 1980s, the space occupied by advertising worldwide expanded considerably. The neoliberal regime has opened access to screens and targets which only yesterday, in the name of public service or the protection of vulnerable categories of the population, were kept closed (Iveson, 2011). This continues to happen because political power has struggled to create value for citizens in public space, while corporate power is willing to purchase potential public media space and turn it into branded space where capitalism can once again speak its glorious message, consume constantly. Naomi Klein argues that the balance of public space and private space has been compromised, "somewhere along the line, the order flipped. Now buses, streetcars and taxis, with the help of digital imaging and large pieces of adhesive vinyl, have become ads on wheels." (Iveson, 2011). Here she is referring to the transit systems that is forced to seek sponsorship by creating private-

public relationship where media space is exchanged for capital, again this increases the voice of advertisers and diminishes the public voice. Furthermore, this tightly control space is subject to private rules which creates the partial nature of the public space. This issue cannot be overlooked, these private-public partnerships essentially turn citizen spaces into consumer spaces by saturating them with adverts and controlling the spaces. Public spaces are valuable areas that capital should not extensively and exclusively brand. These spaces are capable of being public spaces that are home to many forms of political, economic, and social relationships; however, advertisements contribute to and constrain certain types of interaction and public discourse (Lewis S. , 2003).

On that note, a few solutions for this imbalance were suggested by Iveson in his book. The installation and maintenance of free public media space as well as financial compensation is one solution that could be funded by private capital in exchange for access to the public media space; furthermore, “the taxing of all advertising revenue raised from third-party advertising revenue, so that a proportion is returned to municipal authorities who could use it to provide and maintain their own outdoor media space for public use” (Iveson, 2011). These are two solutions to the saturation of privately branded space. These solutions would allow public spaces to gain influence, while impeding the process of private capital’s influence. However, more research should be conducted on the effects that these partnerships have on the well-being of the public.

The Social Side of Space:

The discussion surrounding the social side of space concerns itself primarily with the daily behavior of the public. From an individual perspective, the way people engage with private space has consistently changed over time. From a community perspective the way groups engage

with branded space has grown more prominent since the expansion of screens into daily lives. Over time, private spaces have conformed to capital's commands, turning the home into a branded space of consumption. For example, the introduction of the television into the home shaped how homeowners engaged with their living rooms. Slowly the furniture and food bought for the home was to be conveniently consumed while watching TV. Unfortunately, the TV only accelerated the branding of social spaces. "The evolution of technology in the recent years (both in hardware and software) promoted the sprawl of augmentation in the city, generating a large variety of manifestations, from conventional large screens (wrapped on the buildings) to media architectural hybrids where the pixels become architectural elements." (Andreea, 2013). Thanks to capital, the growth of technology has not only allowed branded spaces to engulf transportation routes and public space, but it has also enable the micro spaces of mobile devices to propagate into nearly every aspect of modern society. Mobile screens have unleashed the reach of branded spaces to the point where digital natives are exposed to saturated branded spaces from an extremely young age. This early adoption and reliance of branded spaces will likely be a cultural issue moving forward because individualized screens continue to erode the collectivity of community spaces.

However, from a global perspective branded spaces are continuing to converge; melding into one large uniform space by maintaining effective communication through language. As Tufi and Blackwood explain, the communicative function of an advertisement which uses a verbal message is carried out via one or more languages (Tufi & Blackwood, 2010). Moreover, as certain languages, like English, become more dominant the advertisers' ability to spread uniform messages across the globe become easier. This uniform message can be seen in global brands' advertisements, such as Coca Cola's Open Happiness campaign in the 2010 Winter Olympics;

however, these global brands can curate branded spaces such as shopping centers, music festivals and other large events where the audience is potentially multinational. In consequence, the multicultural global cities today are branded with the same advertising. A great example of this ubiquitous global advertising can be observed in subway station. This global infrastructure allows capital to use similar brand to spread the same message, consume constantly. The subway ads from Lewis' perspective "beckon commuters to cross the tracks and climb into an imaginary life of luxury and comfort." (Lewis S. , 2003). In summary, these globally branded spaces have converged towards capital and consumption with no focus on culture.

The Cultural Side of Space:

The expansion of capital and consumption into spaces has directly affected the cultural side of space. As brands continue to extend their reach into public space, the space for authentic culture has become rare. As Iverson found in this research, the critics who condemned outdoor advertising were concerned about the expressive power that public space was losing to branded spaces (Iveson, 2011). This branded space longs for the consumer's attention not the citizen's actions. Furthermore, as public space continues to morph into branded space few citizens seem to notice, until the concrete space they engage with is physically shaped by brands.

For example, Grancea article discusses how KitKat branded a park bench, that could have been used for public art, by suggestion that "both the bench and the KitKat bar can provide moments of indulging oneself, moments of relaxation, sweet escapes from the tough world of work." (Grancea, 2013). Just like the park bench, Sonnenburg and Baker suggest that "almost everything today can be branded like products, services, organizations, people, events, buildings, streets, cities, region or nations." (Sonnenburg & Baker, 2013). This leads the citizen consumer to live their life in branded space. There is no longer a balance between capital space and cultural

space. Unfortunately, there are no areas for citizens to engage with space authentically because “brands are engraved in our everyday and it is not clear any longer who ‘owns’ the brands” (Sonnenburg & Baker, 2013). The branded spaces are not controlled by one source, instead the constant struggle for the citizen consumer’s attention is played out on space. Brands become the cornerstone which provide reasoning and logic to the citizen in their daily information overload (Sonnenburg & Baker, 2013).

No longer can citizens engage with public space; in consequence, rare authentic culture can only be found in the depth of history books and academia. As this cultural space decreases, citizens have turned to consumption to form identities in their capital branded city spaces. Unfortunately, the consumer has limited control of the space. The consumer decides which spaces to engage with, but doesn’t decide how to engage with it. The engagement with branded space is determined by the capital that shapes society. In the modern day, this can be observed online through website like Google where the consumer decides what information they want to consume, but Google control how that consumption takes place and where, whether it be through another Google platform like YouTube or other large media sites. Thus, the small culture of cyberspace is control by capital turning the web into another space branded by capital and commercialization.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the extent to which space has been branded by capital is comparable to the extent to which salt, sugar and fat have saturated daily diets. The branded space that saturates global cities have impacted space on three levels; political, social and cultural. This impacted can be seen through the global food industries and the global transportation industries at large. Furthermore, the impacts capital has had through advertising the consistent message “consume

constantly” has played a role in the transformation of citizens into consumers. The extent to which capital brands space global is an issue that should be recognize and discussed in public, the social, cultural and political implications of this saturated space will continue to confuse citizens and comfort capitalists. This paper has only scratched the surface of the extent to which capital space effects modern civilisation. As technology continues to flourish and digital worlds expand into daily life more rapidly these issues of capital’s role in digital space should be understood. This paper’s purpose was to give an overview of the issue and give the public an understanding of the space they engage with daily.

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