

Manuel Delgado, *Capturing Public Life*
Review: *El Animal Publico:*
Hacia una Antropología de los Espacios Urbanos
Anagrama, Barcelona 1999

Over the years diverse attempts have been made to seize and theorize the defining features of public life. The ephemerality of life on the street and the difficulty of reflecting this in theory has been a common topic discussed in Simmel's (1903) account of mental life in the metropolis, Lofland's description of the city as a meeting place between strangers and Sennett's (1990, 1994) discussions of the importance of a contrasting, stimulating streetlife for developing a democratic society.

Manuel Delgado's book *The Public Animal: Towards an Anthropology of Urban Spaces* - not yet published in English - provides a first attempt at developing a methodological and theoretical framework for public space that manages to capture the fluctuation of public life and the transitory character of urban social relations. For the author, to apprehend public life one has to focus on '*the urban*' rather than on the concept of the city. As opposed to much urban anthropology which is an anthropology **of** or **in** the city, or an emphasis on either territory or space, '*the urban*' requires a focus on the social processes and interactions in public space that are never structured because they are always in the making - fluid entities. This unstable character of public life requires the method of '*floating observation*' which means that one does not focus attention on a particular event or thing but takes in an array of information until patterns and significant themes emerge. According to Delgado the observer should draw on a range of cinematic devices such as a focus on material details: gestures, verbalizations, sounds and corporeality to grasp the collage of moments: 'Things that sometimes happen and that will not happen ever again' (Delgado 1999). Delgado aims to show how society is made, rather than to reflect the interactions of society. The observer thus becomes a furtive hunter, similar to a journalist, always on the lookout for situations, occasions and happenings.

The book evolves around ways of capturing fleeting presences. Delgado starts with the experience of complexity: how is one to account for spaces of constant movement? Like the main character of Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Jeff, who observe his neighbours' lives through his telescope, a filmic anthropology based on montage and snapshots would aid the urban researcher to arrest the always disappearing moment. Delgado carries on to examine public space as the space of generalized liminality, of society in the making. In a further chapter, drawing on his background in religious anthropology, the author offers a close analysis of the importance of the sacred in today's public spaces and the role public space has for the dissemination of new religious movements.

In his last chapter Delgado concludes with a theoretical framework built to make sense of the public realm. He outlines a trialectic that differentiates between polis, city and urbs. The polis is the political space, an ideal, imagined utopia. The city is the materialized polis, the stable construction of a collective space. The urbs is the creative social force of the city, as expressed by its users in their daily contacts, ever changing movements and meetings. Thus the street becomes the place of absolute democracy for Delgado, wherein the polis is constantly subverted by the urbs. The protagonist of the street is not the political animal but the public animal.

Delgado's elegant writing is very engaging. He reflects his argument in a vibrant, flowing prose. He makes his point about how to theorize and analyze public life by offering a challenging montage of ideas and providing readers with a stimulating mix of arguments from films and writings on cities. Delgado draws from a broad range of classical anthropological and contemporary, urban sociological perspectives, including writers from the belgian-french school of thought such as Isaac Joseph, Jean Remy and Collette Petonnett.

Delgado's book is a very positive account of the anarchic, subversive powers of public spaces - as his description of the ultimate democratic space suggests: 'There are no limits to public space, as the street is always a limit' (Delgado 1999). Urbanism in his view is always subverted by '*the urban*.'

At times one is left wondering whether Delgado's account is too optimistic, as issues of power and coercion throughout the built environment are left untouched. One wonders what Delgado would say about the increased regeneration and gentrification of city centers, where the users of public places are replaced by new ones through political and economic means. The question is left open whether public life is still a rich, democratic space full of contrast or whether it is increasingly becoming homogenized and hygenized

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References

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Recommend Documents. El Test Del Animal. Descripción completa. El Test Del Animal. El Test Del Animal. El Animal Social. El Animal Social. El Hombre Animal Etico. El Maltrato Animal. Texto Argumentativo de mi autoría referente al maltrato animal. Animal. MALTRATO ANIMAL Discurso. El Hombre Como Animal Simbolico. 1 animal (instintos, funciones). el reino animal the animal kingdom. 2 rough (person) (basto). f. & m. animal, brute (person). m. animal. animal de carga beast of burden. animal de compañía pet. animal doméstico farm animal; (de granja) pet (de compañía). animal protegido protected species. * * * animal. -o adjetivo. el público se puso a gritar a lo bestia the crowd began to shout like crazy (colloq). todo lo hace a lo bestia he's so slap-dash in everything he does. conducen a lo bestia they drive like madmen (colloq). Main El animal público. Mark as downloaded. El animal público. Manuel Delgado. Year Whether you've loved the book or not, if you give your honest and detailed thoughts then people will find new books that are right for them. 1. Carlos V, el César y el Hombre. ePubLibre. Manuel Fernández Álvarez.