

# Intercultural interaction and “situational places”: a perspective for urban cultural geography within and beyond the performative turn

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**Abstract.** With the performative turn in social sciences and the humanities the concept of performance has arrived in human geography. Performance denotes an understanding of social actions and practices as constitutive for non-representational realities. This paper looks at the relationship between places and performance especially in urban geography and develops the new term “situational place” to grasp the increasing phenomenon of (intercultural) encounters in the cities of modern world society. “Situational places” are situated performances of these (intercultural) interactions between strangers in cities of the contemporary world society. With the aid of performance theory the influence of the omnipresent interactions between strangers in cities on urban space is conceptualized. Therewith, we hope to present some fruitful theoretical and empirical possibilities for a cultural urban geography within and beyond the performative turn.

## 1 Introduction

In contemporary human geography many different theoretical turns are discussed. The spectrum ranges from the linguistic to the somatic, from the spatial to the performative turn. Most of these theoretical turnarounds could be subsumed under the broader umbrella of the cultural turn. In this paper we understand “turn” as a metaphor for a movement because it signals and is a sign for the eternal motion contained in human geography. A scholastic fixing of theoretical concepts in human geography is in many accounts impossible because of its openness and conceptual complexity. It may well be argued that it is exactly this conceptual flexibility and openness, the constant ability to transgress boundaries, that characterizes human(e) geography as a discipline beyond “disciplination”. The different turns which are discussed in recent human geography could be considered as empirical evidence of sorts for this theoretical thesis. Within this broad field of different turns the argument of this paper focuses on one very specific problem: the implications of the performative turn for urban geography or cultural urban geography. Because the performative turn gives space for

a conceptualization of acting as performance, it is our aim in this paper to elaborate the advantages such an approach might bring to urban geography. In particular we look at intercultural interactions in cities as a means of scrutinizing the conceptual advantages of the performance concept. In contemporary world society such encounters between different cultures are on the increase, in particular in cities. The local level of interaction seems to be a key concept to understand the workings of world cities in a world society (Amin, 2002). Within this intellectual context, the term performance emphasizes that society is “a multi-verse, not a uni-verse” (Latham and Conradson, 2003:1902). In this paper we develop the idea of “situational places” to refer to and reflect upon the influences of these intercultural encounters and their performances on urban spaces. The main aim is to conceptualize the performances of intercultural encounters in cities and their link to urban spaces and places in cultural urban geography.

Based on the outlined understanding of “turn” as movement in human geography the paper starts out with a discussion of the performative turn and the concept of performance in general (Sect. 2). In the following part the paper reflects on existing work in urban geography using performance as a theoretical tool (Sect. 3). Subsequently in the fourth section an example is presented for a performative approach in cultural urban geography by using performance as a theoretical



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tool for an analysis of reflexivity toward the role of meaning in interaction processes in cities. The concept of “situational places” is introduced to cultural urban geography in order to be able to frame and think through some of the influences of intercultural interactions as performances on urban space. We hope that such a theoretical approach to cultural urban geography will be helpful in particular when addressing questions of innovative empirical work in cities of the world society.

## 2 Performance

The performative turn is a strong signal in the wider cultural sciences that action is not merely to be considered as practical and script following. Rather, performance implies a notion that action is also symbolic, public as well as social (Eyerman, 2004). With its emphasis on practice accompanied by a symbolic and communicative dimension performance can help to analyze the affectivity of human action. Thus, performance could be interpreted as a reflection of practice and reformulation. Thereby, on the one hand it allows framing the research process differently and on the other hand the concept of performance gives space to address new questions about everyday experience that more representationally oriented approaches have failed to deal with adequately (Latham, 2003:1994). It allows insights in the reflexivity of symbolic, public and social action.

Following Thrift performance is “the art of producing the now” (2000:577) which emphasises the event-character of the present world. Hence, fluidity, moments of becoming and conceiving of social life as a stream of practices is a clear strength and weakness of the performance approach at the same time. Therefore, performance is an exiting but often – until now – mostly marginal theoretical tool in cultural urban geography. The world in which people live appears to be symbolic and to a large extent erratic. Performance is one theoretical conception to think about this excursiveness as reflection of action. In the following parts of the paper we firstly try to develop a perspective on the hardly comprehensible semantics of performance. Secondly we want to show some ways and projects of applying this theoretical approach to urban geography.

The performative turn has been adopted by human geography in the 1990s. Here, performance means an “engineering of the moment” (Thrift, 2003:2021). But the first attempts to connect performance theory with wider social sciences had already begun outside geography as early as the mid 1970s. At the beginning of this connection the eclectic term of performance is used with two different meanings. The theoretical interpretation originates from the confrontation of performance art with cultural anthropology and sociology in the 1960s. This symbiosis is interwoven with the names of Richard Schechner (e.g. 1971, 1973) and Victor Turner (e.g. 1990). The dramaturge and university professor Richard

Schechner recognised seven areas, which he considered to be, on the one hand, essential components of each performance according to theatre theory and, on the other hand, sketches and overlaps ranges of social science and performance in order to connect both areas. Schechner identifies performance in everyday life, the structures of sports, ritual, play and political behaviours, by analyzing different modes of communication, connections between human and animal behaviour patterns, aspects of psychotherapy that emphasize person-to-person interaction, ethnography and prehistory and the construction of unified theories of performance as theories of behaviour (Schechner, 1973:3).

In contrast Erving Goffman used the term in a slightly different meaning in order to explain the “interaction order” (Goffman, 1983). Interaction order implies that human interaction always starts without any exertion of influence by the environment. According to Goffman universal rules of interaction are existent in any circumstance, and the social sciences have the task to scrutiny these universalities (Goffman, 1983:2). According to Goffman performance will be of significance if the social environment is considered and interaction takes on the character of theatre play. For Goffman such performance is “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (Goffman, 1969:19). Thus, Erving Goffman understands the concept of performance as an imitation and enactment, which expresses itself in mundane interactions both consciously and unconsciously.

These more applied parts of performance studies are based on the break-through from theatre of theatrical enactments and the simultaneous emergence of new art forms like happenings etc. (Carlson, 2004:220). The main attribute of the practical semantics of performance is the failure of the authoritative character of the drama in relation to the enactment itself. All actions which might be observed could therefore be understood as performance. Today, performance is a recognised topic in wider areas of the humanities, the social sciences and cultural studies. Due to its widespread appearances it exists in the varieties mentioned above (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000:411) or as Schechner puts it, performance is “not only about time and space but also about extensions across various cultural and personal boundaries” (Schechner, 1990:43).

Performance as an event crosses borders which used to distinguish art from everyday life and also from different social scientific categories. As a consequence of these manifold transgressions, the social sciences started to think about performative behaviour, e.g., like humans “playing” gender, stressing their designed identity, reacting different by the erratic social environment or presenting different self drafts in different situations (Schechner, 1998:361). With the core ideas sketched out the performative turn, henceforth, is a reminder within the geographical discourse of the event character of the human lifeworld. Human beings

(re)act emotionally, affectively and momentarily on erratic traits of the social environment. According to this observation human geography could be steering towards research activities that include both: the significance of human actions and the importance of emotions, desires, intuitions, and beliefs because both concepts have an equal share of the constructivist character of reality. The concept of performance provides for a theoretical idea, a methodological perspective, and a language which enables human geography to include the immaterial, subjective parts of human social perceptions (Latham and Conradson, 2003:1902). For that reason, the term is part of the reflexive thought in human geography. The consequent relational position tries to achieve an intellectual position from which it is possible to overcome a dichotomizing thought and which leads “to recognize the important elements of interconnection which go into the construction of any identity” (Massey, 1999:12). Performance as main concept of the performative turn integrates itself in this relational position within and beyond the cultural turn in human geography.

In order to understand the semantic breadth of performance three different strategies in university performance studies are recognizable at the moment. A first strategy is rooted in dramatics. Here, performance is understood as a ludic category. The play works as a surrogate for the openness and contingency of the performance concept. This kind of performance studies focuses on the enactment or play and thereby on “classic” dramatics, which rests upon the separation of drama and enactment. The “bringing on stage” has equal rights concerning the drama and represents no longer a subordinate or parasitic category with respect to the text (Worthen, 1998:1100). A second strategy is based on tradition and its display in everyday life. Performance is being moved from the position of being a simple synonym for enactment to a position of being a significant part of culture in an anthropological sense (Sauter, 2000:38–39). This second variety of performance stands close to cultural anthropology (Schechner, 1998:360). It is possible to trace it back as far as the workings of Gregory Bateson. Bateson conceptualizes performance as a cultural medium for the representation of something non-attendant (Ness, 2007:14). Thus, performance is a media-cultural practice. The third strategy encompassing the breadth of recent performance semantics focuses on the event as its theoretical core. An event is unique, unforeseeable, and irreproducible. Such a clear focus on the temporal singleness of a unique event leads to phenomenology and produces a radical empirism of the “now” (Dirksmeier and Helbrecht, 2008). In contemporary research this third strategy is to be found above all in phenomenology, in radical empirism and in postcolonial studies (Ness, 2007:14).

The mutually shared characteristic of the three distinct, yet united strategies is an emphasis on the inbetween-ness, the “inter” as a well-defined limit to more static and “goffmanesque” concepts of performance. Performance and the

performance studies are work in progress – and always will be. They are “intergeneric, interdisciplinary, intercultural – and therefore inherently unstable. Performance studies resist or reject definition. As a discipline, PS cannot be mapped effectively because it transgresses boundaries, it goes where it is not expected to be” (Schechner, 1998:360). In the context of performative theory the distinction between the “is” and the “as” is important according to Schechner. Performances mark identities, constitute time, form the human body, tell stories and enable people to play with social roles and behaviour which are inconclusive. Each activity, every event or any behaviour could be understood as performance and therefore as being in progress, developing and thus changeable in time. The emphasis and coincident conceptualization of the contingency of human existence is one of the main intellectual assets which afford the theorization of human action as performance despite its somewhat confusing semantic character.

### 3 Performance in urban geography

Cities have always been dazzling grounds of human experience, action, and encounter. Yet within urban geography the theoretical concept of performance has until now been used primarily in the context of studies concerned with the human body and the city (e.g. Pile, 1996). Thus, it is the individual’s experience with its emotional, psychological perspective on urban spaces that have led researchers to use perspectives of embodied practices, psychoanalytic readings and at times performances. Therefore, according to e.g. Loretta Lees (2002) and Nigel Thrift (2004) it is fair to say that too much weight has been placed on representation and symbols as key aspects of cities in urban geography until today. As amendment to the representational approach a practical perspective is required to fully grasp the complexities of contemporary cities (Helbrecht, 2004). This leads to a “transurbanism” and “rather than looking at meaning it looks at performance” (Thrift, 2004:724). By focussing on performance instead of representation, affects, emotions, and practices have become new foci in urban research. Due to modern technologies and the corresponding fragmentation of the social, performance and affect gain in importance in urban geography. For this purpose and tendency, performance provides inspiring conceptual answers. For example, Thrift states “I believe to be one of the most compelling problems now facing those studying the city is how to take affect into our urban accounts” (Thrift, 2004:730). Therefore, it might not be too audacious to assume that performance will become one of the very key concepts in cultural urban geography in the near future.

Based on Henri Lefebvre’s statement that every human body is, produces, and occupies space (Lefebvre, 1991), in the last decades cultural urban geography has turned to bodily performances. Starting with the famous study of Michel de Certeau (de Certeau, 1984), today investigations of the

correlations between human bodies and the city are established in urban cultural geography. De Certeau introduced the idea in cultural and urban studies that pedestrians in the city are involved in the production of unmappable spaces, which cannot be seen in practice. De Certeau sketches a dilemma, because the bodies of the pedestrians write, but the walkers themselves cannot read what it is they write (Pile, 1996:226). The important argument for urban geography de Certeau has made is that urban space is produced through bodily performances – but the results are not perceptible by the performers themselves.

In a similar way Elizabeth Grosz has argued that the city and the human body are interwoven. In a now almost classical paper she elusively elaborated how performances establish urban spaces and urban spaces impinge on bodily performances. The city and the human body are, thus, inseparable from each other. Grosz writes “the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, ‘citized’, urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body” (Grosz, 1998:31). Because of this close relationship between the city and the body performance gains in importance in cultural urban geography, according to Grosz. Hence, performance becomes the place of mediation between the body and its environment.

From the perspective of traditional urban geography that has for a long period been rather interested in stable spatially fixed patterns of social/cultural placement and segregation, these new notions of mediation through performance have clearly altered the perception of space as a place in the urban fabric. That way the recognition of performances has had an enormous impact on cultural urban geography in that performances “are fluid re-creations of identities, multilayered and perhaps ultimately ambiguous because of their temporality” (Foulkes, 2000:224f.). Due to the emphasis of this volatility of performances it has for example become possible to combine theories of identity formation and subjectivity from Sigmund Freud, Walter Benjamin (e.g. Pile, 1996) or Judith Butler (e.g. Gregson and Rose, 2000) with urban spaces (Foulkes, 2000:225). Thus, performance is intensely and in many innovative ways being used now in urban research, e.g. for analyzing daily routines in cities like representations of café consumption as a mode of individual performance and identity formation and so forth (Simpson, 2008).

Yet, from our perspective an important part of possible performative urban research is not intensively enough being carried out, a research alley has only inertly been accessed by cultural urban geographers that could – in our perspective – lead to the heart of city life and urban culture. So far, the concepts using performance in cultural urban geography as outlined above focus either on the construction of the individual (or the body of the individual) or on specific types of bodies and identities e.g. pregnant women or homosexual men in the city. Especially feminist research has elaborated sophisticatedly on the social construction of specific bodies

and subject identities through the means of particular performances in public space. Gendered practices, racialized identities and sexualized bodies are being produced through performances and encounters in public space (Longhurst, 2000; Slocum, 2008). Following these ideas “the body is (only, P.D./I.H) the beginning of any conversation on the urban” (Joseph, 2006:247) as American cultural theorist May Joseph writes. Our critique of these body-centred concepts of performance theory in urban geography aims at this still rather bounded perspective. Performances are thought of, interpreted, and analyzed from the point of view of the construction of subjectivities of group identities in the city. But for a deeper understanding of the complexities of contemporary cities the performances of *interactions between individuals* and *interactions between groups* should be considered more. As Valentine (2008:325) has argued, we need to put more research emphasis on the “geographies of encounter” and have a much closer look at microscalar practices of intercultural interaction. Thus, we propose to apply the concept of performance to the realm of social interactions in the city that is to social encounters as the very core of urban culture. An investigation of interactions in cities in general is a desideratum of cultural urban geography. To make a start and trespass into the new area of research, in this paper we focus on a specific type of interactions in cities: intercultural interactions, which are a frequent and important aspect of city life in a world society (Amin, 2002). Our underlying thesis is that these intercultural interactions establish settings which react on the individuals, their bodies, and the urban places they inhabit. Therefore, performance could be a helpful tool to analyze these interactions and their influence on urban space. In the following parts of the paper we present a theoretical framework for intercultural performances as performing places in contemporary cities.

## 4 “Situational places” in cultural urban geography

### 4.1 World society, performance, and intercultural interaction

We all live in a world society. Due to the intense communicative connectivity of people and places worldwide, global occurrences have become points of reference for most discourses and actions on every scale, be it global products, global values, or global discourses. Furthermore, we assume that as the spatial, cultural, and institutional scope of communication is constantly widening the very nature of communication and interaction is also changing. New quantities of global connectivity lead to new qualities of worldwide interaction. Therefore, we would argue, that, as a result of the communicative conditions of world society, performance gains crucial importance in interaction, especially in intercultural interaction in cities. Contemporary world society, here understood as the only existing societal system worldwide, is basically characterized by two structural attributes. The first

attribute traces back to the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann developed the argument that world society includes all communications which could be connected and is, thus, globally connectable (Luhmann, 1995:430–432). In accordance with Luhmann the term society nowadays only exists in its singular form. World society aims at a common ground for mutual understanding (or misunderstanding which stimulates also further communication) between social systems like the economic system, the political system etc. For example money is changeable in different currencies, a scientific conference in Brazil is organized in the same way as in Moscow or Djakarta, international airports enable an orientation for flight passengers using pictograms, and renting a flat is possible by almost the same rule in most of the cities world wide. Therefore, following Luhmann's theory world society "is the encompassing social system that includes all communications, reproduces all communications, and constitutes meaningful horizons for further communications" (Luhmann, 1990:176). Hence, society is the reason and realm for the possibility of communication between social systems. Obviously, even a world society sustains borders to mark the contrast with its environment, i.e. all systems which are not able to communicate. According to Luhmann national states therefore do not constitute societies anymore, yet they might accommodate different cultures. This concept implies, in fact, that national states or national borders are no longer the determining features of worldwide communication processes, but they still are one of many structuring elements of contemporary society. Therefore, national borders are still significant, in specific, yet to be determined ways. National states still remain important, although they constitute only one form of organization among various others. "State boundaries are significant, but they are just one type of boundary which affects the behaviour of world society" (Burton, 1972:20). In fact, world society is associated with characteristics that improve the impact of global culture(s) on national states, including circumstances favouring the distribution of world-politic models, extension of world-level associations, and efficient scientific and professional power (Meyer et al., 1997). Thus, the internal structure of world society is at best described as a network consisting of a multiplicity of small-worlds<sup>1</sup>, e.g. the economic system, nation states, the UNO, social insurances, the FIFA or the internet and so forth. These sub-networks of world society consist again of millions or billions of different elements (Stichweh, 2007:141; McCue, 2002).

<sup>1</sup>Small world networks can be defined as "so called 'scale-free networks' that are able to incorporate a significant number, even billions, of knots or members. Locally they can be characterized as clusters of members closely linked with one another. Via some individual members who possess extensive links to addresses outside of the local cluster these clusters open up towards macrosocial environments" (Stichweh, 2007:140–141). Following recent research the small-world structure is conjecturally the most frequent form of networks in nature (Watts and Strogatz, 1998).

A second structural attribute of world society pertains culture. With respect to the converging character of societal processes Anthony Smith (1990) enunciates the argument that this observation is not tantamount to the convergence of a global or world culture which seems to be suggested by concepts like "Globalization" or "McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 1993). He addresses a broad sense of the term culture. Culture as an idea (e.g. Mitchell, 1995) is in a strict sense only thinkable in the plural, i.e. cultures. In this context, world society is a subsumption of all occurring communication or all social processes but not of all cultural differences (Smith, 1990:171). The semantics of the term culture is a standard of comparison. Culture does not mean a substantial and durable context of specific meanings like norms, values, styles, beliefs, symbols and so forth but a contingent horizon of time-bound meanings. Culture means that at a certain place something is done following assignable rules but simultaneously at a different place different rules are valid for the same thing or practice (Stichweh, 2008:8). Therefore, culture as merely time-bound meaning enables a comparison of various phenomena through time. Following Zygmunt Bauman culture does not mean the creation of any order for social coexistence. On the contrary, culture is the ongoing impulse to differentiate, arrange and classify (Bauman, 1997:133). Culture should therefore be understood as a diacritical praxis, which means permanently drawing contingent distinctions into a world that is fundamentally indeterminate (Boeckler and Berndt, 2005:72). For instance ethnic identities are thus amongst other things constructed and altered through cultural practices and the performances of cultural differences. Yet, the construction of ethnicities is entangled with to power games and power imbalances in society. Consequently, culture can be understood as a kind of second-order observation and a form of discriminating practice with reference to the broader social context of time-bounded cultural distinctions (Pott, 2005:89). This concept highlights that the idea of a global or world culture is a practical impossibility. The idea of a global culture is in fact a semantically contradictory conception. The German sociologist Rudolf Stichweh has thus conceptualized cultural diversity as an internalized structural characteristic of contemporary world society. World society "reproduce pre-existent cultural diversity and push it back at the same time, creating new social and cultural patterns of their own" (Stichweh, 2007:135). In other words the culture of world society is its internalized cultural diversity.

For the functional working of world society, very specific performances become crucial. Of particular importance are situations of "culture contact" (Bateson, 1935:178) as occurring interactions between people of different cultural backgrounds. These take place not solely but mostly in cities. Contemporary cities can be interpreted as densifications of interactions (Stichweh, 2000:202). In the cities of present-day world society contacts between people with different cultural backgrounds or believes are frequent. The structure of the different small-world networks which world society

consists of causes an omnipresence of these interactions and encounters. This situation has been studied by cultural geography through applying different theoretical concepts like transculturalism, cultural comparisons, hybridity or culture contact. By contrast urban geography uses much more static approaches like gentrification or segregation in order to understand these encounters. Although the fluid and ephemeral encounters in metropolitan life have been highlighted in one of the key sources of urban studies, that is Georg Simmel's work on the metropolis and mental life (Simmel 1903), this very transient part of public urban culture has barely been studied yet with an intellectual framework of performance. This is surprising and in our view astonishing to a degree of almost breathtaking disregard. One could start speculating whether the very status of Simmel's text as classic has prevented successors from following that route of thought as a (at first glance!) seemingly all too familiar argument. Especially from the Chicago School onwards social interaction and integration in the city has often been scrutinized in a completely different way: in the neighbourhood and workplaces. Hence, cultural contact situations appear fixed. They have mainly been represented by urban geography, until now, in terms of urban patterns and distinct locations. For example gentrification research and segregation studies assume long periods of contact e.g. in urban neighbourhoods and assess the resulting social and/or cultural consequences. Beginning with workings of the Chicago School urban research mostly focuses on long lasting contacts between people or cultures and their impact on urban life. But most of the ensuing encounters between people in contemporary cities are mainly flying and short. Hence, in urban geography voices are being raised which require a steering towards more culturally informed interactional analyses, for instance in the context of the development of a "new urban geography" (Lees, 2002). Of particular interest in cultural urban geography could be, in our point of view, the interconnection of these interactions with place because this point of intersection impinges heavily on city life. In cultural geography the connectivity between people and place is often interpreted to the effect that place functions as a collective anchor of people identity (Pott, 2007:30). The contingent constructions of identity link people with place. These identity constructions are responsible for the "feeling of place" (Wright, 1947:10) traditional cultural geography tried to explore. Culture contact as interaction happens within the terms of somatic perceptibility but is also of limited duration. One sees, hears, feels, and smells the cultural others. However, for an understanding of the performance of interaction visual aspects, bodies, gestures, postures, pitches, odours and gazes are crucial.

Concerning the performance of interaction processes the "restriction of the code" of expressive forms and its synchronic upgrading of importance by analogy to language do not outline a contrast. In world society limited English is simultaneously important and less expressive than a more or less isolated diversity of languages in a world with fewer en-

counters such as it is typical of the modern period. Translated to bodily aspects of interaction this insight implies that performance in interaction is at the same time more important and less expressive than cultural by isolated codes of communication. The importance of bodily expression is conjecturally an aspect of "law of brevity" in linguistics, that is to say the predisposition of words to abbreviate as their occurrence increases (Ferrer-I-Cancho and Lusseau, 2009). Following the communication theory of Shannon (1948) the decrease of word lengths with frequency can be interpreted as evidence of efficient coding. The employment of briefer codes for more frequent words enables the enlargement of the share of information which can be relayed (Shannon, 1948). Recent research in biology suggests that the "law of brevity" as a means for communication efficiency is not unique to humans and can also be found in dolphin surface behavioural patterns for instance (Ferrer-I-Cancho and Lusseau, 2009). The limited and shortened bodily aspects of intercultural interaction in world society are therefore able to transmit a major amount of information despite their narrow forms of expression and can simultaneously be an universal aspect of life in general.

#### 4.2 Intercultural interactions as "situational places" in contemporary cities

Erving Goffman conceived performance as imitation and enactment which takes place in everyday life consciously or unconsciously. People observe each other and they are fully aware of it. Within the framework of world society humans operate always in their own culture and in unison in intercultural world society. Here, the expressive codes of one's own culture will be more dispensable. In contrast the capability of interacting by disregarding specific norms will be more significant. However, for the mutual understanding in such interactions the temporal acceptance of cultural norms of the other is not enough. Intercultural interaction opens space for a discursive juxtaposition which connects the authority of the involved cultures with a historical and cultural relativism. The intercultural interaction therefore undermines the authority of the involved cultures and relocates their intentionality. For successful intercultural interaction the physical setting and also the bodily performance in its corporeality, gesture, mimic and performativity is crucial due to their cursoriness and time limitation. Intercultural interactions establish unique, temporary and mostly urban places, which we will name *situational places*. Situational places emerge and vanish with the performative interactions that create them. In principal, every social interaction creates a situational place. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on those specific situational spaces that are created through intercultural performative interactions. Yet, we assume that in contemporary world society it is the individual that steers through the muddy waters of politics of identity and mediates cultural differences. Therefore, situational places that

emerge in intercultural performances are at the same time situational places where performed subjectivities meet and experience their inside as well as constitutive outside – and vice versa. Situational places occur in and modify permanent settings, e.g. architecturally planned and represented places. The main characteristic of these situational places is their volatility in our view. They emerge and vanish in and with interaction. But they are still a part of that idea, Marc Augé called the “anthropological place” (Augé, 1995:42).

Especially feminist geographers have long argued that place, power, and performances intermingle in the co-production of social and spatial categories: “performances bring (...) spaces into being” (Gregson and Rose, 2000:441). And Doreen Massey has developed a relational understanding of place and space that is enormously helpful to scrutiny the multiplicities of possible meanings of each and every urban site. Her credo of a “global sense of place” speaks to the connectivity of urban, regional, or national spaces (Massey, 2004:6). Yet, within urban geography the temporality of place characteristics through performances has only recently been discussed. In recent work in urban geography Vince Miller considers in a similar idea, when he writes about the vagueness and space: “one is able to imagine the city as interwoven and overlapping provinces of meaning, coexisting, and competing dynamic and multiple conceptions of place. In this way, it is possible to conceive of a social geography that does not rely on borders and exactness but on inexactness and layers of experience” (Miller, 2006:461).

Gregory Bateson was one of the first who recognized the significance and importance of intercultural interactions with his concept of “culture contact” (Bateson, 1935:178). Bateson’s main idea is that every culture contact situation is generally intelligible solely out of itself. Culture contact and intercultural interaction are only explicable by an inclusion of the other side of culture, i.e. by including the stranger. Bateson’s term for that phenomenon is “schismogenesis” (Bateson, 1935). He defines it as a process of cultural differentiation. Schismogenesis is “a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals” (Bateson, 1958:175). Abstractly formulated schismogenesis means the emergence of a segregation which shows two dimensions. “Schismogenesis involves the splintering of social forces, institutions, or ideas into diverse directions prior to, and in the process of development of a new synthesis” (Lanier, 1963:10). Schismogenesis includes conflicts and contradictions within an interactional network. The concept involves conflict between (at least) two interacting units, whether these are human beings or simply cultures (Denzin, 1984:485). Thus, schismogenesis is “a classical confusion-of-identity play” (Brox, 1986:307). On the one hand schismogenesis as culture contact leads to a consolidation, e.g. to the identity of an individual or a group. On the other hand this process accomplishes a function of a stranger or an out-group only. Culture

contact temporarily generates a societal unit as a binary of the two cultures in contact. If there are – which is rather constitutive for everyday life in multi-ethnic cities – multiple intercultural interactions taking place simultaneously, more complex forms of schismogenesis than Bateson once assumed are to be expected. Within world society encounters between endless appearances of cultures can be imagined. What seems important to consider, is that it is the very mechanism of schismogenesis itself that helps constitute cultural differences between subjectivities, social groups or nations. Due to the contact these various cultures can merge or isolate considerably from each other. Furthermore, culture emerges in this contact situation, because the contact with the strange is responsible for the existence of one’s own identity. Both cultures – if this is a game between two – are reliant upon each other. Schismogenesis means this emergence of a defined culture due to its contrast with the strange observed vis-à-vis. Therefore, a specific culture is always influenced by other cultures. Otherwise a culture would not be a culture.

Ash Amin (2002) argues with an eye towards tensions between different ethnic groups in British cities that much of the conciliation of cultural difference i.e. schismogenesis occurs at the very local level. Here, everyday experiences and encounters are considerable. Amin emphasizes the sense of place with respect to cultural contact. In contemporary world society cultural contact occurs above all in multiethnic cities. Here the encounters between strangers are important, especially the first contact. The first encounter between people unknown to each other shows specific gestures and postures which are jointly responsible for the atmosphere of a place (Laurier and Philo, 2006:356). Of course, each such local event of intercultural contact is framed by an immense intensity of power relations at work. Questions of authority and power, mechanisms of subalternization, issues of hegemony and difference have thus to be addressed by the research agenda and by urban politics, likewise. For that reason, a development of places which are comfortable for all cultures or ethnic groups is an important contribution for societal resilience (Amin, 2002). Cities need places which allow schismogenesis or cultural contact to occur without formal restrictions. Intercultural interactions are dependent on the environment but they have an influence on the environment at the same time or as Massey puts it “what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now” (Massey, 2005:140).

Our concept of “situational places” that we are presenting here steers into this direction. We define a situational place as a spatial occurrence which emerges for a limited period only due to the performance in intercultural interactions. Hence, with its emphasis of the intercultural interaction the situational place is slightly different from related concepts like vagueness and space (Miller, 2006) or “white public space” which is constructed by racialized speech in urban public space in the US (Hill, 1998; Page and Brooke, 1994). Situational places take schismogenesis into account.

The concept emphasizes the role of intercultural interaction between strangers for the establishment of places in cities. In contemporary world society intercultural interactions are an important part of city life. Interactions are able to affect both places and legal regulation. For example interactions between street people and pedestrians in New York's Greenwich Village were considered as an assault on the city's quality of life during the 1990s. The places in Manhattan appeared hostile and uncomfortable for the members of the middle classes. Therefore, laws concerning the public realm were changed. This example illustrates "how microinteractions (talk on the streets, in our case) can help constitute larger social structural phenomena (like new police policies) just as those phenomena 'come back' to constitute the nature of microinteraction" (Duneier and Molotch, 1999:1264). Situational places resulting from intercultural interactions and consequential schismogenesis are an important part of the individual experience of a city.

In our view the link between culture, interaction and place is being established by performance. The concept of performance allows for procedural thinking about the connection between place and culture. Therefore, performance is a possible solution for the theoretical problem of the relationship between a particular place and culture. Following Nigel Thrift performance is a fruitful approach to theorize ordinary improvisations and interactions which produce the presence actively (Thrift, 2000:577). Most notably performance emphasizes the expressive dimension of the human body. The materiality of the human body, its habitus and incorporated cultural patterns builds a possible theoretical bridge across the gap between culture and place. Intercultural interactions and their performances give birth to situational places which vanish with the end of the performance. Situational places are characterized by a "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005:140) and schismogenesis which could turn the same place, e.g. a pub, an underground station, a street party or an esplanade into different situational places depending on whether different cultures are interacting, performing, and schismogenesis happens. Cities in a world society consist of a series of situational places. Therefore, it is possible to think of situational places in cities as integral part of the performance of intercultural interactions. Situational places *are* the performance of intercultural interactions themselves in parts. In line with this idea we suggest a new line of research. Cultural urban geography could turn towards the analysis of the performance of interactions especially intercultural interactions as schismogenesis occurring in cities. Places could be conceptualized as the performance of interactions between strangers with different cultural backgrounds. These could be brief, violent (e.g. Amin, 2002), unpleasant (Duneier and Molotch, 1999) or imperceptible – but in all cases formative with respect to the lived qualities of urban space. In contemporary world society situational places as performance of intercultural interactions shape cities' spaces in a more powerful manner than in all other societal systems before.

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper we have looked at cultural urban geography from the perspective of performance theory. We identified a clear lack of contemporary research which addresses the fluidity of encounters in the city and the ephemeral character of interaction in urban spaces. To fill the conceptual gap we have used performance theory to analyse in particular the new qualities of interaction in a world society. For this purpose, a theoretical approach has been outlined towards a deeper appreciation of the significance of intercultural interactions/schismogenesis to aid the understanding the role and character of places in cities. Therefore, the concept of "situational places" is introduced into cultural urban geography, which is to be understood as an integral part of the bodily performance of intercultural interactions. In contemporary world society intercultural interactions become at the same time more important and less expressive as cultural isolated codes of (bodily) communication. Thus, the theorization and analysis of situational places could function as an important module for cultural urban geography or what Loretta Lees has called "new urban geography" (Lees, 2002). Here semiotic and material concepts are in new ways intermingled. The "new urban geography" could be read as an intermediate theoretical position between materialistic and semiotic ideas in urban geography. The notion "situational place" tries to aspire to this. Situational places are located exactly between these positions as a negotiation of the material and immaterial sphere in terms of performance of intercultural interactions and schismogenesis. The main aim of the paper was to open up debate and sketch first theoretical thoughts which point in this direction for further elaboration of cultural urban and "new urban" geography.

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