

A Tale of Three Cities: The Spatial, Temporal and Demographic Co-ordinates of Urban Sites of Cultural Consumption

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Show and Tell

The bookshop of the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao yielded a splendid object for semiotic analysis. A hard white leather ball with red stitching, the object fits comfortably in the palm of the hand. Emblazoned on it are words – GuggenheimBILBAO – and an image – a green, vaguely canine shape scattered with multi-coloured stars. “Bilbao” asserts the specificity of the local; a formerly maritime and industrial city in Spain’s Basque Region. “Guggenheim” asserts the indeterminacy of the global; other, and perhaps indistinguishable, Guggenheims in New York, Venice, Berlin and soon Las Vegas. But curiously, the ball itself most aggressively asserts spatial specificity, for it is an American baseball, conforming to the diameters dictated by Major League Baseball and complete with the regulation 182 stitches. Aside from its anomalous markings, it is just like the balls thrown by countless pitchers in countless baseball parks from April to November across the United States of America. But aside from this possible utilitarian value, the ball bears enormous symbolic weight, for despite competition from football (the kevlar armoured variety) and basketball, baseball still remains **the** American game¹. So do the words GuggenheimBILBAO really reference the local of Bilbao and the global of the Guggenheim or are both subsumed under the marker of Americanisation? Of course, as many have pointed out, Americanisation is often confused/conflated with modernity. On my baseball it might more properly be said to be conflated with the high modernism or even postmodernism represented by the word “Guggenheim”. But the game of baseball, albeit a tremendous money spinner for team owners, cities and media corporations, still retains associations with popular culture. Hence more clashing signifiers. If the baseball represents the popular and the Guggenheim high modernism or postmodernism, what of the vaguely canine shape? That directly denotes the topiary sculpture standing in front of the museum, Puppy by Jeff Koons which connotes the popular and the

¹ See Roberta E. Pearson, “The San Francisco Earthquake and the 1989 World Series,” in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks, eds., *Journalism and Popular Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1992), pp. 190-204.

representational by an artist well known for such jocular references. But Puppy seems to have been adopted (at least temporarily) as a logo by the Guggenheim Bilbao, so it also serves to connote spatial specificity. What about temporal specificity? All would agree that the Guggenheim and its contents are post-modern with regard to the periodisation of art and architectural history; the exterior deliberately rejects the clean lines and functional utilitarianism of architectural modernism in favour of the polysemic referentiality and materials of post-modernity while the interior houses conceptual pieces that play with the very meaning of the art work. The ideology of baseball stresses its idyllic, nostalgic pre-modernity but its professional, commercial incarnation stems from the industrialisation and urbanisation of the nineteenth century.

Nonetheless, the sport still inhabits a different temporal dimension than the post-modern museum. The Guggenheim baseball's clashing and contradictory signifiers illustrate how cultural objects are positioned within spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates.

The Urban Studies Literature

As a member of the European Science Foundation's programme "Changing Media, Changing Europe", I have taken on the role of the hypothetical female flaneur, the flaneuse, wandering around various European cities looking at sites of cultural consumption and speculating as to how they might map onto intersecting spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates. This paper somewhat formalises my flaneuserie, if you will, by casting it in the form of an academic argument, or at least a series of examples and questions constituting a prologue to a never to be written research proposal. I was certain that the scholarly literature would help in this formalisation: surely urbanists, cultural geographers and other experts² could explain my baseball as well as the other intriguing cultural formations I have encountered in Bilbao, Palermo and Cologne. A crash course on cities and globalisation included some of the usual suspects (Michel de Certeau, Saskia Sassen,

² Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 91-110; Saskia Sassen, *Cities in a World Economy* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2000); Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1995); Manuel Castells, *The Informational City: Information Technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban-Regional Process* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989); Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) and David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London: Routledge, 1995).

Sharon Zukin, Manuel Castells, Arjun Appadurai, Kevin Robins and David Morley), a few anthologies and a somewhat aleatory selection of articles from urban studies journals. I learned that the processes of globalisation have had a massive impact upon cities around the world. The post-Fordist capitalist regime that has seen the transformation of mass production and mass consumption to light industry/small scale production and a niche marketed consumer economy has manifested itself most clearly in urban centres. Some have asserted that this transformation renders cities irrelevant: heavy manufacturing of necessity located in urban centres but the knowledge/service economy (banking, advertising, insurance, and the like) spans the globe. Others, such as Saskia Sassen, assert that post-Fordism and globalisation have resulted in the emergence of global cities (London, New York, Tokyo) that serve as crucial nodal points in the world-wide circulation of information and capital. But while some cities have benefited, others have suffered; many former industrial cities have experienced massive unemployment, economic downturn and increasing social inequality. Even in the so-called global cities much of the workforce holds insecure, low status jobs in the service sector catering for the middle-classes for whom the city is a site of consumption.

And what of globalisation, cities and culture? In their study of the cultural regeneration of London's Bankside³, Newman and Smith remark Cities have been the places where cultural institutions and facilities are located but also where our notions of cultural expression have been forged. However, in the past twenty years, the relationship between cultural expression and the city has been turned on its head as cultural expression is thought of less as a socioeconomic practice that follows in the wake of urban life but is regarded instead as the motor of the urban economy. As such a motor, modes of cultural expression have been identified as a quality of a city that allows it to compete within the global economy.

The urban studies literature concentrates on three forms of cultural competition in which cities engage. The first is the actual production of cultural commodities: some cities such as Los Angeles (film/television), Paris (fashion) and New York (publishing) gain world-wide fame through such production. Noted urbanist Alan J. Scott⁴ identifies the other two forms: "a) the commercialisation of historical heritage or

³ Peter Newman and Ian Smith, "Cultural Production, Place and Politics on the South Bank of the Thames," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 24:1 (March 2000):9-24, p. 9.

⁴ Allen J. Scott, "The Cultural Economy of Cities," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 21:2 (1997):323-339, p. 325.

b) large-scale public investment in artefacts of collective cultural consumption in the interests of urban renovation.”

Both are intended to create a city image that will encourage tourism and attract inward investment by trans-national corporations.

Spatial, Temporal and Demographic Co-ordinates

Urbanists consider city culture in terms of the production of cultural commodities, the exploitation of heritage and the building of consumption sites, but I am interested in city culture in terms of public sites offering semiotically meaningful commodities for leisure-time consumption – restaurants, cinemas, bookshops and the like. While none of the literature that I have reviewed directly addresses this issue, statements by leading urbanists suggest that my thinking is not totally wide of the mark. Scott addresses what I refer to as the spatial co-ordinate, speaking of the relationship between place and culture.

Place and culture are persistently intertwined with one another, for place as it is understood here is always a locus of dense human interrelationships (out of which culture in part grows) and culture is a phenomenon that tends to have intensely place-specific characteristics thereby helping to differentiate places from one another⁵. ... As we enter the twenty-first century, however, a deepening tension is evident between culture as something that is narrowly place-bound, and culture as a pattern of non-place globalized occurrences and experiences.

Thus, on the one hand, and even in a world where the ease and rapidity of communication have become watchwords, place is still uncontestably a repository of distinctive cultures. On the other hand, certain privileged places represent points from which cultural artefacts and images are broadcast across the world and this process has deeply erosive or at least transformative effects on many other local cultures.

In this paper I am interested in cities not as cultural producers but as sites of both “distinctive cultures” and of “non-place globalized occurrences and experiences” displayed in urban sites of public consumption.

⁵ Among the extensive literature on what has come to be called “place-marketing” see particularly Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, eds., *Selling Places: The City as Cultural Capital, Past and Present* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993) 6 Scott, p. 324.

David Harvey⁶ addresses what I refer to as the temporal co-ordinate, talking of the relationship between “things” and “processes” and asserting that the latter have more import than the former for shaping a city’s environment. The ways that particular “thing-like structures” (such as political-administrative territories, built environments, fixed networks of social relations) precipitate out of fluid social processes and the fixed forms these things then assume have a powerful influence upon the way that social processes can operate. Moreover, different fixed forms have been precipitated out at different historical moments and assume qualities reflective of social processes at work in particular times and places. The result is an urban environment constituted as a palimpsest, a series of layers constituted and constructed at different historical moments all superimposed upon each other. The question then becomes how does the life *process* work in and around all of those *things* which have been constituted at different historical periods? How are new meanings given to them? How are new possibilities constructed? Centuries (or even millennia) old European cities have sites of consumption that were originally constituted in, or at least, reference, a myriad of different historical periods.

A crude periodisation might range from the pre-modern to the early modern to the modern and the post-modern.

Niche marketing is seen as a crucial aspect of globalisation and post-Fordism yet nothing in the urban studies literature I have read addresses the particular and specific niches of urban markets⁷. A city’s sites of consumption encompass a range of cultural values and appeal to a range of target audiences; e.g., an ethnic restaurant patronised by those with high cultural capital but relatively restricted economic capital and McDonalds, patronised by a diverse group of consumers.

Demographics, time and space constitute a three-way grid on which one might map a city’s sites of cultural consumption. Such mapping might complicate the often binary terms of the debate about globalisation, with proponents seeing it as a utopian force and opponents as a dystopic force.

⁶ David Harvey, “Contested Cities: Social process and spatial reform” in Nick Jewson and Susanne MacGregor, eds., *Transforming Cities: Contested Governance and New Spatial Divisions* (London:Routledge, 1997):19-27, p.21.

⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, of course, conducted much of the research for *Distinction* in Paris, but Paris was merely the site of his research, not a factor in his research, for which he has been criticised.

As Kirsten Drotner⁸ argues: A note of cultural optimism [stresses] new possibilities in globalisation processes of reaching beyond narrow local and national confines and creating dialogues that enhance mutual expression of and respect for multiculturalism and civil rights, thereby ultimately advancing social change. The other is a note of cultural pessimism focusing either on the dangers of social and cultural atomization ... or, conversely, on a cultural assimilation to the USA and its economic and cultural standards. In other words, the contrasts between and complexities of a city's sites of cultural consumption might be far more nuanced than the opposition between an ethnic restaurant and a McDonalds.

Three Cities

I played flaneuse in the Italian city of Palermo, the Spanish city of Bilbao and the German city of Cologne.

The first two are located in the relatively economically disadvantaged southern Europe, while the third is an important city in one of the European Union's most economically powerful states. Bilbao, situated on the banks of the Nervion River, lies in the heart of Spain's Basque Country. Industrial development proceeded rapidly in the nineteenth century, with the city becoming a centre for the shipping and railways that distributed the products of its mining and metal (iron and steel) industries. The city reached its economic peak in the 1920s but continued to prosper in the period after the Civil War.

But in the 21st century it has become a city "located on the periphery of the continent, far from the most successful cities which constitute what is presently the European "core"", which has "experienced processes of deindustrialization and a subsequent huge loss of full-time male employment in manufacturing."⁹ Even the city's boosterish web site admits, "At the moment the whole of this zone [Greater Bilbao, the area of influence of the Nervion Estuary], which relied upon industry as its main source of income, is undergoing a period of economic recession."¹⁰

⁸ Kirsten Drotner, "Disney Discourses, or mundane globalization", paper presented at the Second Plenary Conference of the European Science Foundation's "Changing Media, Changing Europe" Programme, Copenhagen, Denmark, April, 2002, p. 2.

⁹ Maria V. Gomez, "Reflective Images: The Case of Urban Regeneration in Glasgow and Bilbao", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22 (1):106-121, p. 106.

¹⁰ www.bilbao.net (10 April, 2002).

Saskia Sassen points to Bilbao as a place where the economic restructuring and regeneration processes of globalisation and post-Fordism might not succeed. "The most difficult cases are small- and medium-size cities in somewhat isolated or peripheral areas dependent on coal and steel industries. They are likely to have degraded their environments and hence to not even have the option of becoming tourist centers."¹¹

Palermo is a port city on the island of Sicily at the tip of the Italian peninsula; it is in southern Italy, historically less economically advantaged than the country's north. The island's militarily strategic location has made it attractive to foreign invaders from the Greeks to the Normans to the Americans. The still unrepaired World War Two bomb damage in Palermo attests to both the city's centrality in Allied military planning and to its current economic deprivation. More recently, the city suffered military invasion from the mainland, when the Mafia's brazen assassination of state officials caused the Italian central government to impose martial law. The city is now experiencing another sort of invasion; that of would be immigrants to Europe from north Africa.

As Saskia Sassen says: "Old port cities such as Marseilles, Palermo, and Naples are already experiencing economic decline and will be unable to absorb the additional labor and costs [of functioning as gateways into Europe for immigration]."¹²

Although these cities may function largely as entrepôts, with variable shares of immigrants expected to move on to more dynamic cities, there will nonetheless be a tendency for resident immigrant populations to grow. Among my three cities, Cologne is the most prosperous and the most imbricated in global flows of capital and information. Like Bilbao, Cologne, located on a river (the Rhine) developed as an industrial and transport centre in the nineteenth century and suffered decline resulting from post-Fordist economic transformations. Unlike Bilbao, however, Cologne seems to have fully reversed its declining fortunes. The city's official website¹³ has clearly been written by someone aware of the links among a city's image, economic regeneration and inward investment and tourism; the web pages represent Cologne as the epitome of the dynamic, post-Fordist, globalised city. In the last decade Cologne has developed from a classical industrial centre in to the modern service centre in western Germany. Today Cologne is associated primarily with the media, tradefairs and culture, in addition to chemical and mechanical and electro-engineering. Cologne, is Germany's

¹¹ Sassen, p. 46.

¹² Sassen, p. 48.

¹³ www.koeln.de (10 April, 2002)

leading media metropolis, a tradefair venue of world renown and a cultural centre.

The website speaks of “heading toward the knowledge society,” telling us that “in our rapidly changing society, knowledge and information are achieving an ever higher status.” Cologne is home to such key components of the knowledge society as the media, biotechnology and genetic engineering and Germany’s largest university, the Universitat zu Koln. The website informs us that “Cologne is Germany’s TV capital, and at the same time, the leading radio centre.”

These, then, are the cities in which I wandered encountering cultural forms. My research has been neither methodologically sound nor comprehensive; I am not trained in urban studies, spent only a few days in each city and cannot claim to have a deep knowledge of any of the three locations. My encounters reflect my own cultural predilections and prejudices; another person would most likely have had a completely different set of encounters. My report is anecdotal and impressionistic. But these limitations do not invalidate the basic point of my argument. Locating urban sites of consumption on what are often multiple and overlapping spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates reveals the nuances and complexities of globalisation. As for the rest, I am only too happy to be set right.

Urban Sites of Consumption

The Guggenheim Museum chain, the McDonalds of the art world, has franchise holders both in the United States and Europe: the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Guggenheim Museum, Soho; Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; and soon, Guggenheim, Las Vegas. Like McDonalds, Guggenheim is an instantly recognisable brand, at least among the desirable market segment of upmarket, international tourists rich in cultural and economic capital, at whom the Bilbao franchise seems most directly aimed. Like McDonalds, the Guggenheim guarantees consistency of product across all franchise locations. It does this however, not by ensuring that every Big Mac is the same as every other Big Mac, but by ensuring that there is only one Big Mac, which can theoretically be recreated at each of the franchise locations. So, for example, a massive black semi-sphere construction which I saw in the Bilbao Guggenheim will be exhibited in the New York Guggenheim. But rather than ship the actual object across the Atlantic, the Bilbao curators will destroy the first manifestation of the concept and their New York colleagues will build its second incarnation. The Guggenheim guidebook relates this Big Mac strategy to the cutting edge of the art world: “The physical manifestation

of a work was considered simply a byproduct of the cerebral creative process or idea. Conceptual works are often ephemeral or can be remade repeatedly, just as words can be used again." Or as a Big Mac can be remade repeatedly. But the guidebook speaks of post-modernist conceptual art in a modernist, or even early modernist rhetoric designed to preserve the aura even of an

artwork that can be constantly remade and relocated. The permanent exhibition was collected and donated by one great man and his wife.

"Changing Perceptions shares with an international audience the Panzas' prescient vision as collectors and the innovative work of a generation of artists who changed the direction of modern art."

This discourse of auteurism, connoisseurship and patronage echoes claims about art's transcendence dating back if not to the Renaissance then at least to the Enlightenment.

The guidebook again: "Through art, [the artists] have found a means of expressing simple truths about culture and existence. A former student of philosophy, Dr. Panza considers the work he collects to be part of a larger theoretical and spiritual inquiry, an integral aspect of a personal search for meaning." Of course this liberal humanist discourse has always claimed global application.

The tourist literature I collected insists on the Guggenheim's internationalism in order to put the right feet in the galleries (and then subsequently into Bilbao's hotels, restaurants, and shops). Despite the fact that the Guggenheim has been given the European Museum of the Year Award (one of the few markers of location found in the tourist literature and on the Museum's website), Bilbao's promoters repeatedly stress the non-localness of the new structure. It's designed by Frank Gehry, one of the elite of international architects (as is Norman Foster, who designed the Bilbao Metro).

The Guggenheim will "convert the city into a centre of international artistic interest" or "put Bilbao in the international limelight..."¹⁴ The Guggenheim's po-mo architecture and conceptual art mark it as international and distinguish it from Bilbao's other museums. In a city which still seems largely to respect the Christian Sabbath (there is no Sunday shopping), the Guggenheim is open every day from 10:00 to 20:00 including Sundays. The Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, which a tourist leaflet says "has the second best collection of classical art in Spain, after El Prado" but amongst which seems to be a good deal of Spanish classical art, does open on Sundays, but only briefly, from 10:00 to 14:00. The yet more local Museo Vasco (dealing with the prehistory, archaeology, ethnography and history of the region) opens only for a brief

¹⁴ www.bilbao.net (10 April, 2002).

three hours on Sundays, from 10:30 to 13:30. There's also, for the social scientists among you, a direct inverse correlation between the global/the national/the local and admission price: the Guggenheim charged 1000 pesetas; the Meseo de Bellas Artes 600 and the Museo Vasco 300.¹⁵ The Guggenheim Bilbao is a deliberate strategy on the part of the city's government and business interests to render the city distinctive through globalisation, but does anything in the Museum itself signify the local rather than the global? Once inside the building, one could be anywhere in the world, the only indicators of location being the Spanish and Basque language text panels preceding the requisite English language text panels. On the guided tour (but not in the guidebook or on the website), one learns that the building's location and appearance are meant to connect the Museum to Bilbao. The Museum was built on the site of a demolished factory by the side of the Nervion, and elements of the building reference Bilbao's industrial (the grey titanium plating) and maritime (metaphoric references to ships and sails) past. These evocations of the local and to history are at a rather high level of abstraction but might still be intended, in Kevin Robin's phrase, to "re-imagine urbanity" in terms other than the stark functionalism of the architectural modernists. "Universalism and uniformity are associated with a crisis of urbanity. The postmodern city is then about an attempt to re-imagine urbanity: about recovering a lost sense of territorial identity, urban community and public pace, It is a kind of return to (mythical) origins."¹⁶ This re-imagining might have a dual purpose, suggest Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo.¹⁷ "The planned adoption of all manner of historical references, particularly architectural references, in the fabric of the built environment" might create familiarity, "unlike the constructions of modernism that allegedly ignore history, culture and place, and thereby alienate people from their surroundings." Such familiarity might "encourage inward investment from enterprises and tourists while also securing the loyalty of local residents." We shall return to the question of the loyalty of Bilbao residents below, but for now let us move on to another global franchise, Shakespeare, as manifested in Palermo.

¹⁵ Of course, now the admission prices will be in Euros, a marker of globalisation, but a variance in admission prices probably still attests to distinctions amongst the global, the national and the local.

¹⁶ Kevin Robins, "Prisoners of the City: Whatever Could a Postmodern City Be?" in Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires, eds., *Space & Place: Theories of Identity and Location* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), p. 304.

¹⁷ Gerry Kearns and Chris Philo, "Culture, History, Capital: A Critical Introduction to the Selling of Places," in Kearns and Philo, p. 6.

Shakespeare, despite never having travelled in Europe (as far as we know), was in many senses a European. As a man of the late Renaissance, he benefited from that great flowering of Western civilisation; he set his plays in various European countries displayed familiarity with the classical Greek and Roman civilisations and, despite his friend Ben Johnson's jibe that he "had small Latin and less Greek," apparently spoke a smattering of French, Italian and Latin. Since at least the eighteenth century, when the Germans enthusiastically embraced the poet as "unser Shakespeare" and produced the first foreign language translation, Shakespeare has also been the most successful of Britain's cultural exports, having great impact upon European countries. As the website of the scholarly Shakespeare in Europe Association tells us, 'shakespeare's importance for European culture is ... documented by his influence, since the late eighteenth century, on national literatures, by the many translations and adaptations made, by the frequency of Shakespearean productions on the European stage, and by how Shakespeare has become an icon for poetic genius.'¹⁸

Italy was a particular favourite of Shakespeare's; several of the plays (e.g. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet*) take place in that country. Not surprisingly, Verona makes much of its Shakespearean connections, hosting an annual summer Shakespeare festival and directing legions of tourists to the supposed Casa de Guilietta in the town's centre. This assertion of distinctiveness through the exploitation of cultural heritage seems intended to lure tourists from nearby Venice and Florence, more firmly established as deriguer sites of cultural pilgrimage. Verona has appropriated early modern culture into the post-modern economic regime of tourism and the leisure industries. Yet while Palermo lacks the flourishing tourist and service industries of the northern Italian cities, Shakespeare still figures in the city's sites of cultural consumption. While I was there, one of the city's theatres was staging *Re Lear*. With title, director, cast and language of performance all Italian, *Re Lear* was a national manifestation of a global culture that originated in early modernity, went global in modernity and flourishes in post-modernity. What of the production's demographic co-ordinates? I have no local evidence, but if Italian attendance patterns for serious drama resemble British and American ones, the audience would have been composed of the relatively old (at least over forty), the relatively well-educated and the relatively affluent.

It might also have included students from nearby secondary schools and the University of Palermo, some of whom might have been studying Shakespeare as part of their formal education. Yet Shakespeare manifested himself not only in the relatively elite and restricted confines of the live

¹⁸ www.unibas.ch/shine/baselconf.htm

theatre but also in a restaurant where I had an “Otello e Desdemona” pizza. In Italy as in the rest of Europe and in the Anglo-phone former British colonies, Shakespeare is part of everyday, popular culture. But Shakespeare is also part of global elite culture, as is classical music, having been trans-European since at least the days of the high middle ages when musician composers travelled from royal court to royal court.¹⁹ I am a particular fan of the marketing niche labelled “early music”, music from the Baroque and before, that has, in the last two decades or so, become firmly established in the classical music market place through early music festivals (Utrecht, Glasgow, etc.), specialised labels (Hyperion, Gaudeamus, etc.) and star conductors and performers (John Eliot Gardiner, Emma Kirkby, etc.). Although early music constitutes an international marketing category in that the specialised labels and star performers appear in almost every country, judging by my Italian experiences, the market does have national inflections. On my last three trips to Italy (Verona, Udine and Palermo) I’ve gone to cd shops to purchase early music, or “musica antica” in its national inflection, searching especially for “obscure” Italian composers performed by Italian artists on Italian labels not marketed outside Italy. The market is locally, as well as nationally inflected: in the Verona and Udine shops I found music from Sienna, from the Piemonte and from the Friuli. But in Palermo, in a shop with a stock every bit, if not more, extensive than those in Udine and Verona, I found no Sicilianian early music. Was this absence yet another example of the Italian north/south divide that favours the culture of the former over that of the latter? But whatever the global, national or local inflections of the early music marketplace, it constitutes a small market niche for those with high cultural capital and some disposal economic capital. My other Palmertian musical encounter had a more popular aspect. The musical *Lady in the Dark*, written by American playwright Moss Hart, with lyrics by Jewish-American Ira Gershwin and music by German Kurt Weill²⁰, was playing at the Palermo Opera House with an Italian cast and production crew. A truly international production, the plot of which I managed to follow half by deciphering the heavily accented English of the Italian actors and half by

¹⁹ See Roberta E. Pearson and Maire Messenger Davies, “A Star and His Audiences: Patrick Stewart and Cultural Mobility” in Martin Barker and Thomas Austin, eds., *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (London: Edward Arnold, in press) and Maire Messenger Davies and Roberta E. Pearson, “To Boldly Bestride the Narrow World: Shakespeare, *Star Trek* and American Global Television,” paper presented at the Second Plenary Conference of the European Science Foundation’s “Changing Media, Changing Europe” Programme, Copenhagen, Denmark, April, 2002

²⁰ I’ve not managed to find a date for the musical, but it must date from the 1930s or 1940s since it was made into a 1941 film directed by Mitchell Leisen and starring Ginger Rogers.

puzzling through the Italian supertitles. Like *Re Lear*, *Lady in the Dark* constituted an Italian appropriation of global culture. But while the former appropriated an early modern text often seen as belonging to high culture, the latter appropriated a modern text emphatically belonging to the American popular culture that has spread around the world. And what of the demographics? The patrons appeared predominantly Italian and relatively affluent, judging by their well-dressed appearance. Their behaviour (about which more below) indicated that many of them attend opera house productions frequently.

The night before leaving for Palermo I was idly channel-surfing and lighted upon the *The Godfather, Part II* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1974). The film begins with the funeral of the godfather's father in Corleone, which, I learned in Sicily, is a real Sicilian town, home to many Mafiosi. Prior to attending *Lady in the Dark*, I took a tour of the Palermo Opera House with my ESF colleagues. The high point, or at least the point that most excited the media scholars, was the royal box where the Corleone family had sat before the violent conclusion of *The Godfather, Part III*. The same shop where I purchased my musica antiqua prominently displayed a twenty-fifth anniversary boxed set of all three *Godfather* films, labelled *Il Padrino* and presumably dubbed into Italian. Although quite specifically located both temporally (the modern) and demographically (a mass audience), *The Godfather/Il Padrino* trilogy has a very complex relationship to the global, national and local circulation of culture. As one of the best known films of the Hollywood cinema, it is part of the most high profile aspect of global American popular culture. But as I saw in Palermo, both Italians and Sicilians relate to the film as somehow being "theirs."

Professor Antonio da Spina of the University of Palermo even suggested to me and my ESF colleagues that the trilogy, together with other Mafia-related popular culture, might give Palermo and Sicily the distinctiveness needed to compete in the international tourist market. To complicate matters further, my colleagues and I debated whether the trilogy might in some sense be considered European film. Although originating in Hollywood, the film is directed by an Italian-American descended from immigrants and deals with the European experience in the United States.

My final Palmertian example is the Opera di Pupi, a Sicilian puppet show in which half-life size puppets enact the exploits of knights, ladies and Moors at the time of the Crusades. I and several of my ESF colleagues went to a puppet theatre in the heart of Palermo's tourist district, near the great cathedral. Although the puppet tradition dates back to the travelling players of the Middle Ages, this theatre has been there since 1893, originally owned by the current proprietor's great-grandfather, as we learned from the proprietor's introduction and the wall display. The proprietor and his assistants voiced the

puppets in the traditional Sicilian although the pre-recorded soundtrack seemed to have been creatively updated. Although complicated in its temporal co-ordinates, being ancient and modern, with perhaps a touch of post-modern irony that better Italian than mine may have detected, the Opera di Pupi seems indisputably local and popular. But while the production was local, its consumption was national and international: the audience seemed to contain few Palmertians, or even Sicilians, but was rather composed of Italians from outside of Sicily together with a few other foreigners like us. Nor was the production indisputably popular, at least in origin, being based on the Italian version of the *Chanson de Roland*. Matteo Maria Boiardo wrote *Orlando Innamorato* as a first instalment of the Orlando story, but left it unfinished upon his death in 1494.

Ludovico Ariosto continued the story in *Orlando Furioso* first published in 1516.

Given Renaissance literacy rates, the written versions would have been accessible only to an elite, but, like Shakespeare, the story contains enough sex and violence to appeal to all in dramatised form, as it may have when performed by Renaissance travelling players.

I visited a friend in Cologne in early December of last year, during the run-up to Christmas. Festive seasons, as with Christmas in predominantly Christian nations, involve participation in national and local traditions and rituals perceived to be longstanding (even if recently invented). In Cologne, however, the *Harry Potter* posters plastered all over town spoke not to the local or the national but to the global, commercially imposed, seasonal rite of the Hollywood blockbuster film. In accordance with the dictates of the Hollywood distributors and their overseas minions, parents all over Cologne, Germany and the rest of Europe were simultaneously treating their children to *Harry Potter* as part of the Christmas holidays. But only in Cologne and the rest of the country could the families precede or follow a visit to the cinema with a trip to the outdoor Christmas fairs that, to me at least, seem particularly German. The fairy tale hut stalls, the hot and spicy gluewein and speisbraten of the Cologne Christmas fair all harked back to some mythical, Grimms Brothers version of the German past. The nearby Renaissance Fair was a German appropriation of a global or at least Western phenomenon. My German friend said that the vendors were speaking cod medieval German (as opposed to cod Elizabethan English), a food stall sold what my friend translated as “bandit’s pot barbecue”, and the items on offer – birdwhistles, hats – were slightly different than those at similar events in the US or the UK. The Christmas fair most probably has fairly deep roots in German culture but most likely bears an encrustation of fairly recently invented traditions, perhaps dating to the nineteenth century’s “creation” of the Christmas holiday as currently celebrated.

The Renaissance Fair, by contrast was a post-modern simulacra, a part of the heritage culture that now thrives in Europe and the United States. Both fairs, however, probably appealed to relatively the same demographic of families with young children, perhaps those very families on their way to or from *Harry Potter*.

The *Harry Potter* posters were the most ubiquitous and predictable Cologne manifestations of a global Anglo-phone culture; the two other examples I encountered were rather more surprising. My friend recommended a visit to the Buchhandlung Walter König, a bookshop specialising in art, photography, film and design which had a better and more extensive collection of English language film books (including one of my own) than bookstores in New York or London. That night my friend took me to the Trauma Video Shop, which offered a better and more extensive collection of English language cult cinema than video shops in New York or London. The Buchhandlung Walter König, proudly referenced on the Cologne website, and the Trauma Video Shop tend to confirm the website's boast about Cologne and the knowledge society. The city seems to constitute a key nodal point in the international distribution of niche market English language books and videos. But the bookshop occupies a different market niche than the video shop, as hinted at by the website's inclusion of the bookshop and omission of the video shop. Universities' incorporation of cinema in their curricula in the 1960s rendered film studies and film books "respectable." But cult film still seems marginal, even "trashy" (despite the fact that it too is now included in many universities' curricula). Jeffrey Sconce says, in his seminal article on the topic, "Paracinematic culture seeks to promote an alternative vision of cinematic "art", aggressively attacking the established canon of "quality" cinema and questioning the legitimacy of reigning aesthetic discourses on movie art."²¹ Cult film fans value cultural marginality, opposing their "tastes and textual proclivities ... to a loosely defined group of cultural and economic elites."²²

The contrasts among *Harry Potter*, the bookshop and the video shop show that one must seek nuance and distinction even in the global circulation of media-related Anglo-phone culture.

Global Structures of Circulation/The National and Local *Longue Duree*

²¹ Jeffrey Sconce, "Trashing" the academy: taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic style," *Screen* 36:4, Winter 1995, p. 374

²² Sconce, p. 372

The above evidence, albeit anecdotal and descriptive, serves to substantiate my claim that locating urban sites of consumption on multiple and overlapping spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates reveals the nuances and complexities of globalisation.

But can one go beyond description to the explanatory and predictive capacities of the models beloved of social scientists? How to account for the location of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, the longevity of the Opera di Pupi in Palermo and the presence of the Trauma Video Shop in Cologne? I have already suggested that the Guggenheim constitutes an effort to place the city on the circuit of international tourism and that the Trauma Video Shop attests to Cologne's centrality in the circuit of global knowledge. The Opera di Pupi might survive in its present family-owned cottage industry form precisely because Palermo is fully inserted into neither circuits of tourism nor of knowledge; it neither aspires to nor has attained the status of the globalised, post-Fordist city. A more daunting series of hypothetical questions arises if we perform the semiotic commutation test. Could there be a Guggenheim in

Palermo? An Opera di Pupi in Cologne? A Trauma Video Shop in Bilbao? These questions can be answered partially in terms of the structuring factors of global forces, which Arjun Appadurai²³ gives us a vocabulary for discussing.

Ethnoscapes-- the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world

Financescapes – the disposition of global capital ... as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed....

Mediascapes refer both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios) ... and to the images of the world created by these media.

I omit Appadurai's technoscapes and ideoscapes (the former referring to the global movement of technologies and the latter to ideological configurations) but need to add the global circulation of commodities and transport to his list. The global circulation of peoples, finance, media, commodities and transport to some extent determines the spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates of urban sites of consumption, but as Appadurai suggests, mapping such flows is a difficult, perhaps impossible, task.

These various flows ... are in fundamental disjuncture with respect to one another.... What I would like to propose is that we begin to think of the

²³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 33-35.

configuration of cultural forms in today's world as fundamentally fractal, that is, as possessing no Euclidean boundaries, structures, or regularities. Second, I would suggest that these cultural forms ... are also overlapping in ways that have been discussed only in pure mathematics (in set theory, for example) and in biology (in the language of polythetic classifications).... Finally, in order for the theory of global cultural interactions predicated on disjunctive flows to have any force greater than that of a mechanical metaphor, it will have to move into something like a human version of ... chaos theory.

Appadurai²⁴ indicates that such mapping, even if possible, will not generate parsimonious or predictive models. To complicate matters further, one needs also to factor in the national and the local long duree. Not only global flows render a Guggenheim Palermo unlikely, so do the pervasive corruption and illegality of Sicily's longue duree, of which the Mafia is a fairly recent manifestation. And while global flows, or at least potential global flows, might account for The Guggenheim Bilbao, the institution and the economic regeneration scheme of which it is part must also be considered from a national and local perspective.

While the positive impact that self-government has granted the whole Basque country cannot be denied, the effectiveness of the numerous initiatives accruing from the different government tiers is not so clear with regard to Bilbao's revitalization. Stemming from the democratic era, the public sector in Bilbao consists of a complex set of institutions: the Basque government, the provincial government and the municipality. All of them have perpetuated the traditional and visible Spanish divorce between policies which emphasise territorial approaches and those which target sector problems without paying attention to their physical dimension²⁵.

Individual Agency: the Performance of Identity

The mapping of global flows and the factoring in of the national/local longue duree might account for the emergence of cultural forms but cannot predict what happens when structuring forces meet individual agency. If you build a Guggenheim Bilbao, will they come? How will they respond? What will it mean to them? And how will they make it mean for them? Sharon Zukin suggests that cities have symbolic, as well as actual economies. "As a source of images and memories [culture] symbolizes "who belongs" in specific places.... The growth of cultural consumption (of art, food, fashion,

²⁴ Appadurai, p.46.

²⁵ Gomez, p. 112.

music, tourism) and the industries that cater to it fuels the city's symbolic economy, its visible ability to produce both symbols and space."²⁶ The city's residents

and visitors then use these symbols and spaces to make statements about who they are in the world, to perform their individual identities across urban sites of cultural consumption. Again, the presentation of an explanatory or predictive model of what we might term "urban performativity" is beyond my capacities, but I can offer suggestive examples.

Let's return once again to the Guggenheim Bilbao. International tourists visiting the museum might be performing the role of connoisseurs, as they seek to enhance or to display their cultural capital. Bilbao visitors might well do the same, but might also perform their "Bilbaoness", acting as proud civic boosters. And others might just want to blow the place up. Here's a news article I found on the web.

Three men have attempted to bomb the new Guggenheim Museum Bilbao disguised as gardeners working on Jeff Koons' giant Puppy sculpture. The plot was foiled by two Spanish policemen, one of whom was shot and killed in the attack. The men had flower pots that police discovered contained 12 grenades set to explode by remote control.... Spanish police claim that the men are members of the Basque separatist group ETA, which has been waging a 29-year campaign for an independent Basque state.

If the police claim was correct, the three would-be bombers visited the Guggenheim to perform their Basque identity in rather forceful fashion.²⁷ Clearly, the local inflection of the museum's post-modern architecture had not secured the loyalty of these particular residents.

And finally, let us return to the performance of *Lady in the Dark* at the Palermo Opera House, an Italian appropriation of American popular culture in terms of both production and reception. The production had an Italian director, an Italian cast speaking Italian, and several interpolated references to limincello (a lemon liqueur from Sorrento). In a textbook example of the local appropriation of a global form, the audience laughed at limincello but didn't laugh at the many contemporary American references in Gershwin's witty lyrics. Audience members followed what I assume to be the codes of behaviour suitable to an Italian opera house. They applauded cast members who performed difficult songs, particularly the diva, who seemed familiar to them (might she have been a Palmertian?). During the elaborate and lengthy curtain call, which featured additional music and dancing, several members of the audience walked down to the area in front of the stage to applaud, not something that British or American audiences would do. The audience members in the Palermo Opera House collectively performed their identity as

²⁶ Zukin, p. 1

²⁷ Walter Robinson, Terror Attack at Gugg Bilbao,

Italians. Might attendance at *Re Lear* have caused them to perform their identity as Europeans? Or watching *Il Padrino* their identity as Sicilians or even Palmertians? Urban sites of consumption, located on multiple and overlapping spatial, temporal and demographic co-ordinates, offer a city's residents and visitors a myriad of possibilities for performing different aspects of their identities, for "urban performativity"²⁸

²⁸ <http://contemporaryart.about.com/>
<http://www.artnet.com/>