

Parallel session B2

Black Urbanisms

Monday 11 November, 16.00 – 17.30

IAS Forum

Chair: **Dr Kamna Patel**, Associate Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

Respondents:

Lioba Hirsch, Research Fellow, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

Dr H  l  ne Neveu Kringelbach, Associate Professor, UCL African Studies

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Paper:

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Black urbanism...

may be considered as a series of refrains, calls and responses, parallel but complicit investigations and makings. It is continuously heuristic, yet responding to obdurate, deep-seated structural configurations – of sense and power.

It is about multiple tracks, covering different angles, such as these three reflections of Paul Gilroy, Saidiya Hartman and Fred Moten:

"Critical interest in the sovereign racial orders, hierarchies and ontologies that have assembled the world in raciological and colonial patterns, *connects directly with the central issue of the human*—the conceptual integrity of that vexed category and the problems that link orders of domination among human beings to their various exploitative and extractive relationships with nature." (Gilroy 2018:10)

"The salvaging and refiguring of the racialized human, both before and after the 20th century's noisy death of Man, necessitates the adoption of unorthodox interpretative angles. It includes repeated contrasts between the significance of racial divisions and the attraction of an open category of humanity that is wholly incompatible with race and raciality though still prone to being disfigured by racism." (Gilroy 2018:12)

"In Harlem, strolling was a fine art, an everyday choreography of the possible; it was the collective movement of the streets, headless and spilling out in all directions, yet moving and drifting en masse, like a swarm or the swell of an ocean; it was a long poem of black hunger and striving. [...] Hers was an errant path cut through the heart of Harlem in search of the open city, *l'ouverture*, inside the ghetto. Wandering and drifting was how she engaged the world and how she perceived it." (Hartman 2018:468)

"The black noise emanating from Lowell Cottage expressed their rage and their longing. It made manifest the latent rebellion simmering beneath the surface of things." (Hartman 2018:484)

"Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Real, for in its magnetizing of bullets the black body functions as the map of gratuitous violence through which civil society is possible - namely, those bodies for which violence is, or can be, contingent. Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Symbolic, for blackness in America generates no categories for the chromosome of history and no data for the categories of immigration or sovereignty." [...] Blackness is the site of absolute dereliction at the level of the Imaginary, for 'whoever says "rape" says Black' (Fanon), whoever says 'prison' says black (Sexton), and whoever says 'AIDS' says black - the negro is a 'phobogenic object'" (Moten 2013:241)

It focuses attentions on particular places:

- The place of residency for racially black inhabitants or the place for rendering equivalent the inhabitation of non-black others to those of blacks themselves.
- The place of domestication and fundamental darkness where the inability of those surveying the city to make clear distinctions as to the constitutive identities and practices of inhabitants rendered them “black” – made them in need of subjugation or consigned to a nothingness.
- The place of presumption. It was presumed what took place there, and thus obviated any need to look further, to look at the details of everyday life. As such, residents might seize the interstices between the exertion of control through limiting the spatial extensionality of the black city and disattention to its details to experiment with ways of living. For example, radically disjunctive experiments with reconfiguring relations among bodies, economy and residential units took place in the racially black cities of Chicago and Detroit.
- The place in need of systematisation in order to be elevated at the level of the “city”.
- A place of extensiveness, of extension with and through the earth, as Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter put it, a “disobedience” to the prevailing logics of urbanisation, yet enabling urbanisation to be “what it is”.

And, (mal)practice:

Even as subject to wide-ranging engineering, disciplinary, correctional, compensatory and biopolitical systems which systematically attempt to corral black life within specific forms of visibility and control, what black people did with each other, how they operated in the interstices between constantly being “messed with” and constantly being excluded or ignored was often a matter outside of any accounting, fundamentally *incomplete*.