

The Metaphysical City Reveals a Male Space

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The city created in Micheal Turner's Kingsway is a metaphysical manifestation that exists only at the time when it is construction by an observer. Turner's observations and resulting thoughts create a perceptual version of the city that exists only at the time of his observations. This temporary city is unlike the physical construction of Kingsway, a street in Vancouver, which is represented by conventional maps. "Spatializing Feminism" by Linda McDowell outlines the framing and construction of a space by social and spacial interrelations. Like the space theorized by Mcdowell's essay, Turner's poem creates the space of the city via these sensory interrelations. Turner's poem constructs a metaphysical city using the building techniques McDowell outlines in her essay. When Turner constructs the city it appears as a male space. This is reflected in his observations as well as in the structure of his poem. McDowell notes that female space is often restricted and the physical layout of Turner's poem is not confined, spanning and flowing over the page.

In her essay McDowell suggests that space can be created by "interrelations between objects [...] in space and time; it is these relationships themselves which *create/define* space and time" (Massey 1992:79; original emphasis cited in McDowell 2). McDowell's space, the space created by the interrelations between objects, parallels the space created in Turner's poem. Turner's space, the city street Kingsway, is constructed by the relationship between the observer and stimuli the space emits. Turner's observations and reception of stimuli builds the city and this construction *is* the city. The reader can follow the colours, sounds and other sensory input that Turner receives. He notes the

“paralleling apostrophic storefronts

Crumbling under and old code
of paint, semi-gloss, semi-colon-
ized by retired white-wall kicking
car salesmen: have ize got a deal fer you”
(Turner iii)

A city constructed this way exists within the context of the self; it is created by subjective observations and will be constructed differently depending on who is receiving the stimuli. This constructed, metaphysical city is different from the physical city. The physical city is created by the physical laws of the universe - it is a space that would continue to exist outside of human observation. In contrast to the metaphysical city, the physical city is not created by an observer but by mechanical processes such as laying bricks. The physical city represented in Figure 1 would continue to look the way it does now for several years, while Turner's construction of the city is only present at the time he observes it. If another observer were to take an identical route down Kingsway he or she would construct another version of the street using the current stimuli he or she receives. Therefore, the physical city can exist without an observer but the metaphysical city cannot.

In Turner's poem, space is conceptualized. It is "constructed out of sets of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global." (Massey 1992:80 cited in McDowell 3). The social and spacial interrelations create a city found only in the present – the time at which it is observed and simultaneously constructed. While Turner observes Kingsway, other individuals are constructing

their own versions of what is around them. This multitude of observations creates the collective space of the world. Therefore, both the physical and metaphysical city are complete spaces.

The complete physical space of Kingsway would look like Figure 1. It would be organized, labeled and include no characteristics of the buildings, conditions of the roads, or nature of the people found in that area. The physical space of the city is a documentation of the slabs of concrete and lines of pavement that existed at the time the map was constructed. The streets are labeled and many of the buildings are included in the map. This representation of the city offers no division of space, no categorization of one space versus another. The physical city, static and homogeneous, exists in the past and the future but not the present.

The metaphysical city exists at the time it is observed, and therefore it will vary in appearance from observer to observer. Turner's space may look like Figure 2. This city is constructed using the observer's senses and resulting thoughts. While Turner rides the bus, he will read street names, but may choose to mentally label them by their literal or poetic categories like person, place or thing. This creates a grid of self-constructed labels. As a result, Turner's city will not exist beyond his senses. He cannot see down the entire length of a street or those streets located behind the building he passes, and, though they were labeled in Figure 1, they do not exist in his present space. This reduces the scope of the metaphysical world. However, this does not mean that it is incomplete compared to its physical counterpart. As previously mentioned, the metaphysical city is constructed by present thoughts of all observers located in the area at one time and all of these sensory inputs would be overlapping and occurring simultaneously whereby they would complete the space. Since the city is constructed by several individuals, it can be categorized into areas like "poor, privileged, crowded, nosy" or other such categories that

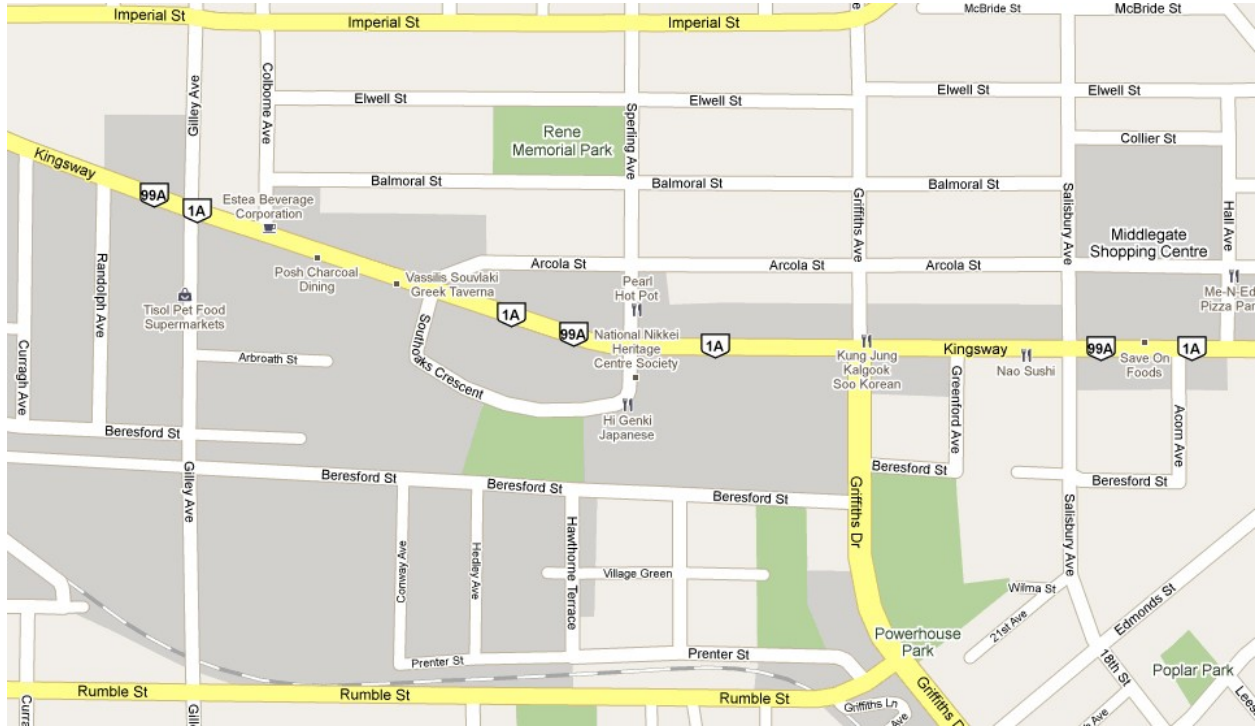


Figure 1 (Google maps)

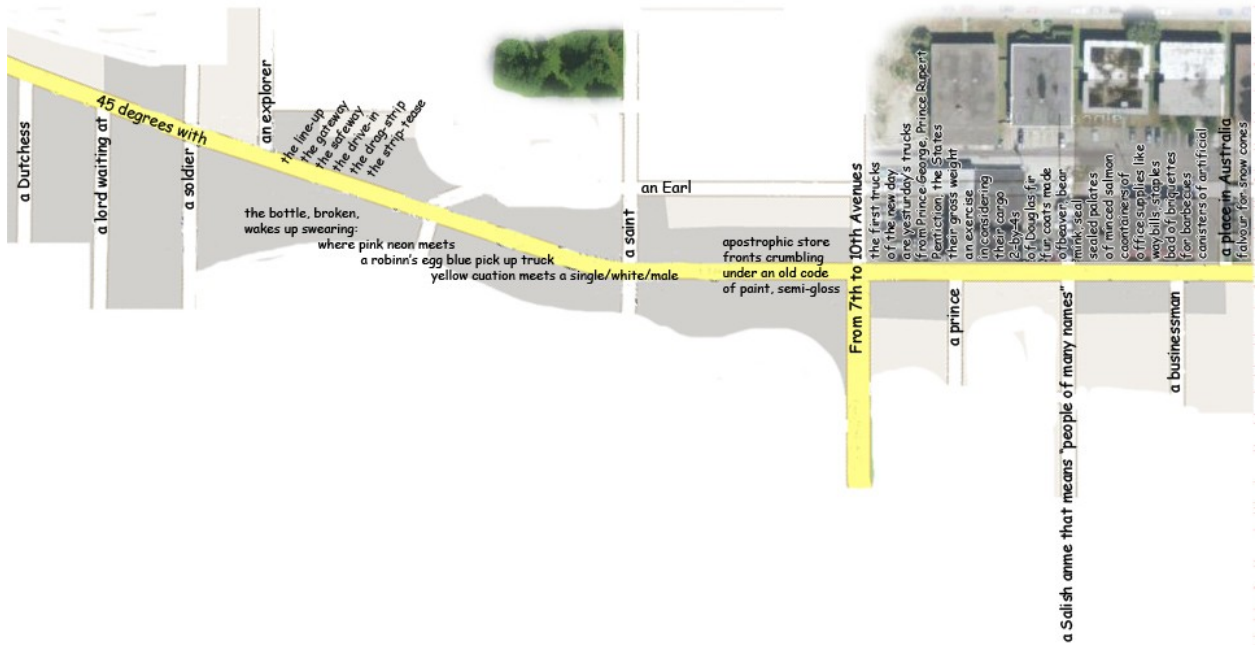


Figure 2 (Edited Google map)

personal experience imposes on a space. This is different from the physical city as these labels are not found on conventional maps.

The metaphysical space Turner creates divides an area into “good” and “bad.” As Turner rides the bus down Kingsway street he observes:

“the line-up
the gateway
the safeway
the drive-in
the drag-strip
the strip-tease” (Turner iv)

The reader can see how the city transitions from a commercial area into a more depleted area. This division would not appear on a physical map of the city. This division is a result of the observers words used to construct their current space. Turner's metaphysical space also allows the city to be divided into places of interactions or states of buildings. He observes the “storefronts crumbling under an old core of paint, semi-gloss” (iii). On the physical map of the city, stores are either present or absent, there is no variation between the viability of these buildings. Turner's space contains observations of quality, giving the city variation among what is found there. The quality of buildings is judged by the observer and this means that the city is under the influence of who is watching it. This sensory construction of a metaphysical space creates a gendered space. From the sensory input he receives, Turner constructs a metaphysical

space that is male.

Sections ii and vii of Turner's poem seem to outline dialogue. When taking a closer look at what is said between the conversers, one can see that there is a very distinct male attitude in the dialogue. In a conversation on the bus, the observer overhears two individuals discussing “teamsters running rough-shod, sliding back and forth a hundred times a day in the November mud. Pissed up and off at the Gladstone or Junction Inns. Yes it is November.” (Turner ix).

Though neither individual is identified by gender, this conversation has a stereotypical masculine colloquial quality to it; there are obscenities and a lack of concern for what others may think about what leaves their mouths. Though neither individual is identified by gender, this conversation has a stereotypical masculine colloquial quality to it; there are obscenities and a lack of concern for what others may think about what leaves their mouths. When gender is identified in Turner's poem, it is almost always males figures to which he refers.

Turner's poem is dominated by male figures in the working world. Turner mentions that “the cop makes a good actor, the grocer almost grosses a million, the clerk used to be a cleric” (x). This list is filled with males, as the endings of professions, such as actor, are grammatically masculine. There are no feminine professions mentioned, leading the reader's mind to assume that this present space is filled with males. Women are rarely acknowledged, it is almost solely white males, “white man” and “single/white/man” (ii), that appear in this metaphysical city. Turner also mentions “the navy in the inlet/with the business of New West” (iii). Both the navy and the business field are dominated by males. While Turner lists street names by category, the reader can see that they are dominated by males. “Beatrice, Sophia/ 3 princes, Earles, a Dutchess, lords/ & ladies waiting at/ 45 degrees with soldiers, explorers/ businessmen, saints” (i). The

female names are outnumbered approximately three to nine. In Turner's city, the physical elements that invade his metaphysical construction of the city are mostly male.

Turner's city is a male space; this is reflected by the form of the poem as well as its content. The poem is a product of Turner's observations and the sensory input he received was dominated by male figures. As a result, the layout of Turner's poem seems to reflect a male's free flowing and unrestricted spatial domain as it "is often women who have the most spatially restricted lives" (McDowell 4). One can see several structural changes between each section and the next, between section iii and iv. The structure of the poem and the way the words fill the page is dominating and expansive. This mimics a masculine spatial domain. As previously stated by McDowell, a woman's domain is much more restricted, possibly condensed into a small area. This does not allow women to occupy much space and this is a contrast to the layout constructed in Turner's poem.

Turner's city is constructed using the building blocks of interrelations outlined in McDowell's essay. The metaphysical space is constructed by social and spatial interrelations. This creates a version of Kingsway that is far different from how it is physically constructed on a map. Kingsway on a map does not contain categories manufactured by the human mind and relevant to individual experience. There is no division of the well-constructed part of town and that which is slowly deconstructing. Turner's map of the city allows the reader to see the division between spaces and classes. Turner's observations construct the city as a male space. He observes very masculine features of the city, such as the people present within the space and the street names. The form of the poem also emphasizes the male dominance of the city. The poem is not restricted to a certain form. The free flowing form of Turner's poem parallels a male space, as

McDoweel stresses that it is women who have a restricted spacial domain. Turner's poem creates a metaphysical, male space that exists in the present and reflects the nature of the self.

Works cited

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