

Flirting with Ephemerality and the Daily Production of the Fleeting City

Authors : Rafael Martinez

Abstract : Our view of cities is dominated by the built environment. Buildings, streets, avenues, bridges, flyovers, and so on virtually exclude anything not fixed, permanently alterable or indefinitely temporal. Yet, city environments can also be shaped by temporally produced structures which, regardless of their transience, act as thresholds separating or segregating people and spaces. Academic works on cities conceptualize them, whether temporary or permanent, as tangible environments. This paper considers the idea of the ephemeral city, a city purposely produced and lived in as an impermanent, fluid and transitional environment resulting from an alignment of different forces. In particular, the paper proposes to observe how certain performative practices inform the emergence of ephemeral spaces in the city's daily life. With Singapore as its backdrop and focusing foreign workers, the paper aims at documenting how everyday life practices, such as flirting, result in production of transitional space, informed by semiotic blurs, and yet material, perceptible, human and tangible for some. In this paper, it is argued that flirting for Singapore's foreign workers entails skillful understanding of what is proposed as the 'flirting cartography.' Thus, spatially, flirtation becomes not only a matter to be taken for granted but also a form of producing a fleeting space that requires deployment of various techniques drawn upon a particular knowledge. The paper is based upon a performative methodology which seeks to understand the praxis and rationale of the ephemerality of some spaces produced by foreign workers within this cosmopolitan city. By resorting to this methodological approach, the paper aims to establish the connection between the visibility gained by usually marginalized populations through their ephemeral reclamation of public spaces in the city.

Keywords : ephemeral, flirting, Singapore, space

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