Space and place = Power / Identity dynamics:

Abstract:

Place, space and power and identity are intriguing concepts and within this essay I want explore these themes further. I will do this by engaging within an observation research process, which is focused upon observing individuals within a library setting. I will argue that within a space and place context, there are significant power dynamics at play, for both individuals and groups, which determines how and why specific identity / culture processes are formulated. In my focusing upon observation research and ethno graphical analytic processes, I will look at how and why space and place concepts, can initiate power dynamic process within both individual and group behaviours and how and why such process, are also related, to identity / culture constructions.

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Place, space and power and identity are intriguing concepts and within this essay I want explore these themes further. I will do this by engaging within an observation research process, which is focused upon observing individuals within a library setting. (*The Robertson library at Curtin University to be specific)*. I choose this specific area to do my observations because I knew that the library was a good spot, where individuals would be at various times and I could also remain inconspicuous to the participants within my observations. The Robertson library on the Curtin campus is a very big library, whereby around 45, 000 students, at some time, use the library. The specific area where I did my observation process, was on the 5th floor of the library, which houses mostly education, chemistry, language and natural sciences books, etc. (Curtin University - Library, 2015, p.1). I observed the social interactions and behaviours of individuals within a 20 metre area / space, which was between the elevators and an informal lounge seating area, consisting of set of 6 - 8 lounge chairs / settings (Appendix: A-B). I collected my evidence by observing and taking notes, I was positioned about 10-15 meters away within an enclosed desk, I observed the participants over a 2 hour period on 24/04/2015, between 1-3pm. I choose a normal university school-day, as I knew there would be a lot students on campus, In fact, I observed around 50-60 individuals within my observation area. Consequentially, I have formulated my observations into an ethnographic framework and will report my findings within this essay. As a result, I will argue that within a space and place context, there are significant power dynamics at play, for both individuals and groups, which determines how and why specific identity / culture processes are formulated. In my focusing upon observation research and ethno graphical analytic processes, I will look at how and why space and place concepts, can initiate power dynamic process within both individual and group behaviours and how and why such process, are also related, to identity / culture constructions. In fact many have suggested that, space and place are interconnected within power / identity processes, by the / an environment and social relations and then via proxy, interpreted into different meanings for a self (Sack, 1993, pp.328-329). While the social scientist, Nagel, tends to imply that identity and culture constructs are continuously negotiated, revised, and revitalised within a historical context, of language, religion, appearance, ancestry, sociability and regionality discourses and boundaries (Nagel, 1994, pp. 152-153).

In fact in my observations, I noticed that nearly all of the individuals at some time, were occupied with either their laptop or Mobil phone, this in turn, tended convey that individuals can and will not to negate their own self, to be subordinate to specific space / place - social, cultural, and identity environments. E.g. Even if the space / area is small and there are noises coming from everywhere, an individual will still use their Mobil device. Thus an individual can have their own individualistic / self - space / place power, over a social, cultural, and identity environment. In-fact according to Hall even if an individual can have some small concessions, as indicated above, in regards to an individual having some power over a social, cultural, and identity environment, it is still the overwhelming power of community oriented, social / culture and identity contexts, which impact within an individual's space / place identity concepts (Hall, 1992, p.7). For instance, as indicated by Hendry, it's by individuals performing their past, via their community - space / place traditional dances, totems and rituals etc., that they in turn, reaffirm their own cultural / self-identity (Hendry, 2008, pp.75-79, 271-273). Indeed it can also be said that when individuals interact and or face each other to communicate, as many of the participants I observed did, this also is a form of self-empowerment over specific space / place - social, cultural, and identity environment. For instance, according to the social scientist Kim, having the curiosity to interact / face another, is self-determining process, which is achieved via a symbolic internationalism dynamic, to thus reaffirm an individual's own space / place – cultural / identity concept (Kim, 2007, pp. 354-354) (Jary, 1995, pp. 672 - 673).

Though I also observed, that all the 3- 4 individuals sitting within the small lounge area, were all around 3 - 4 metres apart and had themselves, (their self), with their back to either a bookshelf or a wall. Thus they were looking forward, endeavouring to indicate to the surrounding social / cultural environment context, that it had no power over themselves, (their self). Indeed this self / identity behaviour, of these 3-4 individuals, tends to confirm DeMiglio and Williams account of how any environmental concept, e.g. social, cultural or landscape, can have an identity and thus power over, objects / entities within this space or place area (DeMiglio, Williams, 2008, pp.18, 25). Moreover, Baker implies that the phenomenological experience of spaces / places interact with our memories, whereby an individual's prior memories of a past specific spaces / places, effect and determine an individual's behaviour within a space / place - present context. (Power over) (Baker, 2012, p.28). For instance using the example above, a reason as to why the individuals had their backs to the wall / bookshelf's, was due to a prior memory recollections of being in a specific space / place, whereby someone sneaked up from behind them, to scare them. In fact such a process may also be obvious when I noticed, that within a space / place context, nearly all the women I observed walked as close as possible to the elevator side wall. Why? Can this be another example of social, cultural or landscape space / places, having an identity and thus power / authority over, objects / entities within this space or place area? For instance the indicated wall space / place, can been seen as very masculine oriented, with its straight lines everywhere. Thus the women wished to counter their own self dis-empowerment / displacement processes, by walking close to the wall for self-security reasons, so that they could walk / look out at / for others. In fact according to Gupta and Ferguson, they imply that power processes and identities are intrinsic bound up within space / places concepts, so much so, that if an individual becomes displaced, whereby they lose connections to their own culture / identity, they in turn can become dis empowered within another culture / identity (Gupta, Ferguson, 1997, pp.6, 13, 14-15).

Yet in a group context I observed that all the individuals within a group stood close together and communicated only to individuals within this group. Tending to indicate that any surrounding space and place concepts, either consisting of the small lounge / elevator area, or the large lobby area, had no real impact upon this / any groups spacial and identity / culture construction. Thus confirming Kim's views, that today's modern cultural / self-identity, is determined by the spacial impacts of globalisation and increased mobility concepts within the world at present (Kim, 2007, pp. 344 - 354). Whereby this is obvious in that the modern cultural /self-identity is really a cosmopolitan identity, which is an cultural / self-identity that is intellectual, mobile and appreciative of both specific and generic spacial identity / culture processes within the world, at present (Bornman, 2001, pp. 7, 14, 21). Moreover I also observed that those individuals that were wearing similar coloured cloths, e.g. similar coloured t-shirt, shirt, jeans, or dress etc., seemed to stand very close to one another and mirror each other's actions. Why? And how does this affect space /place - identity / culture constructions? It has been suggested by some, that this sort of spatial and mirroring behaviour of similar coloured clothed individuals, is due to what Adams would suggests is a confirmation / affirmation of a self-identity concept. Whereby the importance of specific spacial, family / group and cultural self-identity process, is more important than a generic / homogenised cultural community oriented spacial identity process in impacting upon a self-identity construct (Adams, 2003, pp.232-233). In fact such a process also confirms why the concept of ritualism / ritual care, is a very important ethical process within the concept of self, family, group and cultural identity constructs. For instance, within the self, family, group and cultural identity constructs of nurses, punks, gangs, the Amish and even hells angels, it is ritually regarded that the spatial concept of their territories / properties, are embodied within their self / group identity concept. E.g. punks, gangs and the hells angel will protect their specific groups patch / territory / property at all costs (Travers, 1982, pp.278 - 284).

However on the other hand, I also noticed that with the groups that were wearing similar coloured cloths, who were standing very close to one another and were mirroring each other's actions, they were also able to manage their own self identities and that of the an others identity within their group. For instance according to Sökefeld, the self has a inherent ability to manage "difference" and as identities can be different / plural identities, the self in turn, can also be negotiated and influenced by "difference" / plural identities (Sökefeld,1999, pp.424-427). Indeed it has been suggested by Crespi, that within an space / place context, with an individual having the ability to embody, engage and negotiate their own and another's plural identities, really what they are doing is endeavouring to understand / interpret, what is either a coercive or consensual power dynamics process, so as to envisage, how it will either alter / or confirm, (historical-is), their / an individual's / communities identity / culture formations (Crespi, 1989, pp.108-110). Thus it's as though, even within a group context, "difference" is still important. For instance, even though I observed some individuals were wearing similar coloured cloths, and were standing very close to one another and were mirroring each other's actions, I also observed that they had different phones, laptops, backpacks, bags and jewellery etc. This in my view and others, tends to indicate that an individual's own space / place identity construct, e.g. their own specific community / tribal identities, are still a very powerful and important identity / cultural constructs (Agarwal, 2000, pp.170-176). Moreover the geographer Sack tends to suggest, that as space and place are formations of individuals /self's,(signs),this in turn, gives power to individuals /self's to construct the appearance, depth, meaning and reality to space and place -

identity / culture concepts, *(symbolisms)*. For instance, is a space / place authentic, or is it inauthentic and thus a construct of someone historical bias, or how should art / landscapes etc., really be envisioned (Sack, 1993, pp.328-329). Indeed I would also agree with Sack, when he implies that all individuals are "in / affected" by space / place, which in turn entails, that all individuals are really geographical beings, or in my wording - geographical entities (Sack, 1993, p.329).

Consequentially as a result of my observation research process, of investigating the behaviours of some individual / group behaviours within a specific space / place setting and thus endeavouring to explain, via an ethno graphical analytic process, these individuals / groups behaviours, as related to power and identity / culture constructions. I would have to conclude, that within a space and place context, there are significant power dynamics at play, for both individuals and groups, which does determine how and why a specific identity / culture process is formulated. In-fact in summing up this essay I would have to agree with Sökefeld, when he implies, that within ethnographic writing it is essential to interoperate an individual's culture / power contextual processes, which are inherent within their self / identity concepts, otherwise it's not a true / authentic ethnographic process. However the key here, is not to focus solely on an individually oriented ethno-graphical processes, as this would be too biographical in nature (Sökefeld, 1999, p.436). Indeed this has been my endeavour within this essay and I hope - I have, in some way, conveyed this to my reader.

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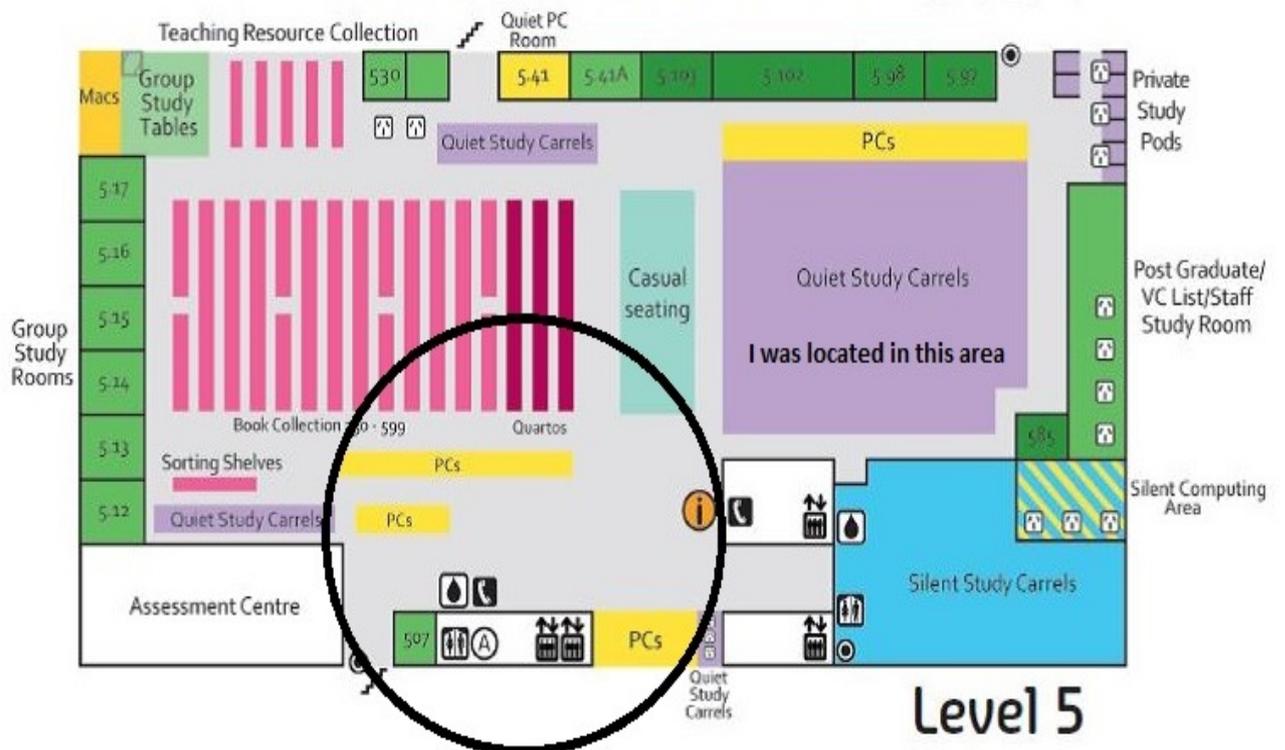
Appendix:

Appendix- A: Curtin University - Robertson Library - level -5

elevator wall side

lobby area

casual lounge / siting area

I was locacted within this area

Appendix - A: Photo / print of where I did my observation within Curtin University - Robertson   Library - level – 5: Between elevators and bookshelf / small lounge area. (*My own photo taken,* via Mobil phone camera - on 20/04/2015):

Appendix - B: Floor Plan of Curtin University - Robertson Library - level – 5, with area marked out where my observation process took place. (Curtin University - Robertson Library - floor plans, 2015, Curtin University – Bentley Campus, West Australia, retrieved from,*http://www.john.curtin.edu.au/robertson library-floorplan/statistics.html, on* 19/04/2015).