

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

EVELYN S. RUPPERT, *The Moral Economy of Cities: Shaping Good Citizens*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006, xiii + 283 p., index.

The transformation of urban socio-spatial form and urban governance restructuring in global or world cities have inspired many recent scholarly studies on the urban problematic. *The Moral Economy of Cities* brings together these aspects through a critical examination of an urban redevelopment project in downtown Toronto – in the intersection of Yonge and Dundas streets.

As a former professional in urban planning and policy, and a current academic in social sciences, Ruppert critically reflects on professional and governmental practices involved in making Toronto a good, world-class city. The book's main thesis is that despite the recent denunciation of the age of the utopian ideals of "the good city," in practice, visions of the good city are still being defined and articulated in city making with the aim of moralizing the conduct of various citizen groups. Professionals (architects, urban designers, planners, and marketers), as a portion of the dominant group, play a central role in reshaping the urban fabric in that "their authority serves as a bridge between knowledge and making the good city and shaping good citizens" (10). Yet, the social misrecognition of their authority as objective, scientific, and rational conceals the racializing, classing, and gendering tendencies of processes of "the construction and the proselytizing of 'the good' in practices (and theories)" (228). This selective interpretation of the good is not only materialized in particular city forms, but also defines who/what groups belong to what kind of city spaces.

Several concepts are imperative in Ruppert's analysis: "city-making," "problematization," and "the moralization of conduct." City-making refers to "practices that shape both materially and symbolically not only the physical spaces of the city, but also the ways of being a citizen of the city" (5). City-making is also utilized as a professional field of action in the sense of Bourdieu's field/habitus (198-199). Problematization is being used in a Foucauldian sense, that is, a process of bringing "something into the play of truth and falsehood and [setting] it up as an object for the mind" (216). In this metaphor, "moralization is the process of defining good and bad relationally" (195).

In the case of the Yonge-Dundas redevelopment, particular groups were identified as being problematic for engaging in panhandling, drug dealing, littering, loitering, tagging buildings with graffiti, and intimidating or aggressive behaviour. Existing retailers were criticized for selling cheap merchandise of poor quality, for not investing enough in the maintenance and security of their properties, for facilitating criminality, and for allowing their properties to become run-down. These problematizations rationalized the making of the Yonge-Dundas area into a good city space, not only in terms of reconstructing the physical space, but also in terms of moralizing the conduct of the various users of the space.

The remaking of Yonge-Dundas district initially started in 1995, with the adoption of the Downtown Yonge Street Improvement Plan by the City Council, which designated the area as a community improvement project area. This designation paved the way for the city to undertake a variety of programs and actions in order to regenerate the symbolic economy of “Canada’s main street” and “the heart of downtown Toronto.” By 1996, an Official Plan and zoning by-law amendments were drafted. The plan foresaw the development of an “urban entertainment centre” (Metropolis) with family entertainment attractions such as multi-screen cinemas, high-end retail shopping, theme restaurants; two media towers for advertisement; as well as a public open square, Dundas Square. In order to achieve this ambitious goal in downtown Toronto, the city had no other way except for assembling land from existing private properties – most of which were owned by immigrant families. Hence, it applied Section 7 of the Expropriation Act, which “allows municipal governments to take away the property rights of landowners, with compensation, in order to carry out a public purpose” (22). However, unlike the major urban-renewal initiatives in the past, which involved the state expropriation of land mainly for public projects, this would involve the taking of land for a public square and a private redevelopment. In 1997, owners of the properties being expropriated launched an appeal to the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) – “a provincially appointed, quasi-judicial, administrative tribunal that resolves disputes, which fall under the Ontario Planning Act” (23). The appellants did not reject change; in fact, they presented two alternative proposals for redevelopment. Nonetheless, the OMB eventually dismissed the appeal and approved the Official Plan, and Dundas Square was officially opened in 2003.

Ruppert elaborates a thorough empirical analysis of the OMB appeal hearings. The new form of the public, urban entertainment space was to establish a family orientation for the Yonge-Dundas area, which meant “the need to change the demographics of the area” (98). Ruppert illustrates how the various problematizations of Yonge-Dundas were based on the authority of dominant groups to establish themselves as the public, and then define a vision of “the good city” into the moral and material vision of the secure, consumer, and aesthetic city.

Each of the three visions – the secure, consumer, and aesthetic city – is developed in a separate chapter. In each case, Ruppert examines the kinds

of problematizations, rationalities, and the proposed technologies that were justified during the OMB hearing. She also analyses how these justifications were rationalized under the rubric of the public's interest; on the grounds that Yonge-Dundas was "a space that belonged to the public and that the presence of others – by default the non-public – was denying them their right to this space" (184). During the appeal hearings this is why the category of the public was defined and constructed mainly on the basis of economic class (middle to high income) and age (young children, adults, seniors). Thus relationally, the non-public also implied an economic class (low-income to poverty) and age (teens and young adults) (185).

The affirmation of the public required the production of the Other. So while connections to race, class, and ethnicity were never explicit in the making of the Yonge-Dundas area into a secure, consumer, and aesthetic urban public space, the public was unified as a group through processes of classing and racializing their Others and naming them as though they were real groups. What was valued economically and morally was the tastes and preferences of middle-class families/tourists and suburban consumers. The vision of security (especially the privatization of security) came to mean securing the space for these particular consumer groups; while young black men were named drug dealers, street youth, or gangs; objectified as signifiers of danger. Visual cues such as litter, unkempt properties, and graffiti signalled bad manners and antisocial behaviours, associated with lower social classes, while good city etiquette and civility were rationalized in terms of advertising aesthetics, as a means of mobilizing and attracting particular consumers and claiming the space for them. Immigrant retailers were named discounters, and the class of their businesses rather than their narrowing of retail came to be the main criterion of dysfunction in terms of the symbolic economy of "the heart of downtown Toronto."

Ruppert then proceeds to show how the authority of professionals, which was influential in both drafting and approving the Official Plan, was built, in part, during the OMB hearings. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault, she situates the experts at the OMB hearing in relation to their relative social positions and dispositions, in the broader context of society, state, and professional associations; and, in relation to the regimes of truth that validated their claims and technologies of governing, inscription, and incorporation in the city-making field. The eligible experts at the hearing were mostly male (of 38 experts, all but three were male), White, Anglo (European heritage), over fifty, principals or presidents of their own companies or organizations, and all members of state-recognized professional associations (153). Thus city forms and designs that professionals produce correspond not only to the interests, preferences, and judgments of upper and middle classes, for whom a space is designated, but also to their own interests as consumers of city space as a cultural good. The rationalities behind these practices can be described as neoliberal in that they involve economic rationalities which represent a shift from the welfare-state and its social organizations towards the more marketized, entrepreneurial, individualized, and consumerist forms of social organizations.

Herein, Ruppert elaborates on E. P. Thompson's concept of "moral economy," arguing that moral and economic ends are not independent of each other. That is economic rationalizations are validated because they are allied with particular moralizations and ends, such as security, consumption, and aesthetics. Professionals play an imperative role in forming the moral economy of cities in the sense that their competition to govern city-making involves not only the pursuit of economic capital but also other forms of capital (social, cultural, symbolic, and professional) and interests (moral). Thus for Ruppert, the redevelopment of the Yonge-Dundas area produced more than a physical square: "a moral economy of cities, geared to shaping good citizens, was also activated and legitimized" (234).

One of the powerful aspects of Ruppert's study is her introducing Manchester's Exchange Square and New York's Times Square, besides Toronto's Yonge-Dundas, in order to illustrate how sites are connected by a broader discourse on the making of "the good city." She does this by identifying the similarities among the deployed problematizations, rationalities, and technologies in the transformation of urban socio-spatial form and the restructuring of urban governance; as well as how professional agents borrowed and exchanged practices of "good" spaces in these particular cities.

Grounding her theoretical focus on "the moralization of conduct" in particular, and "governmentality" in general, Ruppert insistently refuses any reliance on ideology as a theoretical explanation (148). The three visions of the good city – security, consumerism, aestheticization – are elaborated as more than ideological alibis for the redevelopment of the Yonge-Dundas area by powerful groups, namely professionals, national governments, and trans-national corporations. It should be mentioned that Ruppert has successfully stepped over the cliché style of governmentality studies. Yet, her conscious abandoning of ideology has resulted in some shortcomings, especially in terms of the workings of the current global neoliberalism, its affiliation with the capitalist world-system, and its incorporation with Canadian multiculturalism. Hence, while the questions of class, race/ethnicity, and gender have been elaborated in Ruppert's analysis, it is "the moralization of conduct" of various social groups that is understood as the basis of city-making, not the exploitation of marginalized social classes, as well as ethnic and gendered minority groups for capital's conquest of the city. This is a significant issue, especially in regard to a city like Toronto that – as Ruppert herself points to very briefly – while promoting diversity under the rubric of multiculturalism, does not embrace diversity in practice even when it comes to the city's public spaces.

Nonetheless, *The Moral Economy of Cities* engages its readers in depth with various aspects of the complex and imperative field of city-making. It is well-written and thoroughly elaborated, and as such it will attract a wide range of readers. Students, scholars, and anyone interested in urban studies, architecture and urban design, sociology, criminology, anthropology, and cultural studies will find it not only interesting, but also thought provoking.

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