

Cairo, Khōra and Deconstruction: Towards a Reflexive Reading of Place 2011

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Abstract

Cairo, the Egyptian capital, has grown into a complex, multicultural, and high density city. The dynamics of which are reflected through her everyday realities in public urban spaces, which show a growing tension between the different parties involved: formal/informal, private/public, administration/people, and place/people. Simultaneously, Jacques Derrida among few other researchers, questioned the misrepresentation of Cairo-space through the monolithic image of the historic Islamic city, which helped to isolate her from reality and develop the complex and dynamic patterns of relations and tension. Accordingly, the research approaches the paradox of the misrepresentation of the city and questions the role of architects and urban designers towards the city space, who lack the tools to approach these multiplicities and dynamics.

The main aim of the research is hence, to develop reflexive reading strategies of place, with special reference to Cairo-space, which operates between multiple projections of place through both abstract theory and contextual realities. This study draws on a multi-disciplinary approach that considers both theoretical and empirical data. Accordingly, it approaches different theories of place developed through post-structuralism with particular emphasis on deconstruction – khōra -, social studies of place particularly environmental psychology, that intrinsically operate within an architectural background. Accordingly, a case-study of public space in Cairo is studied to reflect on the reading strategies rather than develop a reading of Cairo-space.

Consequently, the research adopts a reflexive methodology to approach the dynamics of this multidisciplinary approach, and which operates on four levels of interpretation; data construction through theories of place and the case study in Cairo; a primary interpretative framework of place which was developed through a preliminary reading of theories of place; critical interpretation which considers deconstruction reading strategies; and finally, self reflection that re-approaches the reading strategies critically through 'khōra'.