

The City as Stage

Power and Hegemony in the Public Spheres of Rome, Paris and London in the 17th Century

Abstract

In the 17th century, Rome, Paris and London are shaped by their respective systems of rule, not only socio-politically, but also spatially and architecturally. By ordering the creation of certain layouts (first and foremost of public places) and architectural ensembles, the rulers and their elites formulate messages which, symbolically charged, are to contribute to the making, legitimising and stabilising of their power and hegemony. At the centre of these processes is the production of representative streets and places as stages of power and hegemony which, by creating feelings of wonder, fascination and cultural inclusion, convey specific socio-cultural identities and, thereby, contribute to the reproduction of the existing social conditions.

The public places offer the people who meet or assemble on them (the public) an ambience in which they can attend to their affairs (businesses, rituals, feasts, pageants or processions). Depending on whether and, if so, to what extent the (economic, political) rulers open or limit the access to the place(s), they permit a (more or less) inclusive or exclusive public sphere. Depending on whether and, if so, to what extent the potential public accepts or ignores these limits, the character of the public sphere changes: It becomes more complex, or diverse public spheres (with their individual traditions, ideologies, emotions, goals and structures of action) come into existence, which may overlap, complement or exclude each other.

Keywords

Spaces as Texts, Places as Stages of Power and Hegemony, Productions/Stagings in the Public Sphere, Spatial and Architectural Messages, Legitimation and Stabilisation of Power and Hegemony