

Upheaval: seismic, social and media mash-ups after the Christchurch earthquakes

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Today we experience cities themselves as hypertexts; as spatial grids and narrative fields that are deeply enmeshed in highly contested turf wars—whether waged by ethnic communities, street gangs, corporate competitors, conservancy groups, homeowners, real-estate developers, transportation systems, political parties and their rival urban histories. Our cityscapes are narrative spaces we move through looking for encounters, collisions and causality as we race toward random or predetermined destinations (Kinder).

Introduction

What does such a quote have to do with the devastation, trauma and ongoing struggle in suburb after suburb of Christchurch's earthquake-damaged city or with its expression in numerous private and public media spaces? How does it address the issues of rebuilding and regeneration faced by its citizens? This, more than two years after the first major shock, when they are still facing constantly unstable, changing circumstances, including the shaking ground beneath them?

We ask these questions for several reasons. In part, because the bulk of literatures in urban studies focuses not on damaged cities but the ongoing evolution and transformation of relatively integrated urban spaces. In this context, a devastated city provides a new way of illuminating the narratives and sociotechnical processes that are the focus of this literature. In part, too, because we want to highlight how cities are organized or understood through mediation, and how these mediated networks are disturbed and reorganised by such events.

Beyond this, we ask these questions simply because of our own involvement. One of us lives in this disabled city whilst the other visits and works in it. We have both been parties and witnesses to its immense upheaval. Our own lives and all those we know of personally have been reshaped by its impact.

The way we investigate this is ethnographic: one means of making sense of the mash-up undergone in Christchurch. This mash-up is geological, experiential, mediated and sociotechnical; we would add conceptual, since it requires new ways of thinking about the significance for urban life of such traumatic events. Ethnography is a highly effective method in these circumstances: it follows, documents, assembles and reflects on unfolding, unanticipated events. This parallels the activity amongst Christchurch residents themselves; recording and commenting on the turmoil through any form of available media. Their

activity amounts to a paraethnography (Reichman): an attempt by subjects to make sense, often in informal ways, of the experiences they are undergoing (Holmes and Marcus). This amounts to the assemblage of a new, cross-cutting set of narrative grids and hypertexts arising from the quakes' aftermath. It enables us to follow how citizens begin to re-imagine their city and how this intersects with prevailing literatures on urban architectures and material forms.

We develop the paper this way as a means of playing off, or highlighting, the tensions between sets of disciplinary frames. In this context, it is counter-productive to reduce one to another; privileging media studies, by implication, over ethnography, documentary theory, urban studies or even actor-network theory. This is particularly the case where such disruptive events are, themselves, not only a hybrid assemblage in their own right, but call for a hybrid assemblage in order to understand them.

The primary way we take up these questions is by means of paraethnography and by foregrounding one particular media discourse: Gerard Smyth's film *When a City Falls*. As noted, both ethnography and paraethnography are ideal methods for tracing and assembling the sense of given events and relationships from the perspective of actors themselves. The film itself illustrates this and the widespread response to its release in November 2011 indicates just how well it subsequently captured popular sentiment. We draw, then, on the film as a kind of probe: a way not only of representing local voices and experience, but of investigating wider issues in urban studies as it relates to Christchurch.

We emphasise that *When a City Falls* (hereafter *WACF*) is simply one form of discursive network that ties, or fails to tie, to numerous other networks in mobilising a particular account of what the city was, or should, become. There are numerous other discourses, public and private which emerge in relation to the earthquakes. Following the February 22 earthquake, these ranged from communication via Facebook and mobiles (Hansen), other social media and sites such as TradeMe, Storify or GiveALittle donations (McManus), to the extensive use of Twitter and Twitpics (Parker). Burns and Burgess trace how widely Twitter was used, whilst Mabbett describes not only the different output from the #eqnz and #chch hashtags (#chch aggregated the quake tweets) but also reveals that in the first hour of the February 22 event, there were already 14,000 views online of the damage to the Cathedral.

If these voices constitute a concert of voices, then *WACF* is only one account amongst many in the discursive arrangements around Christchurch. Equally, it is only form of discourse because its narrative is juxtaposed, online, with discourses that are textual, aural and visual. These range from blogs to mp3 downloads to the personal images and videos that have flooded Christchurch Facebook pages. Together, they create potentially innumerable, dynamic sociotechnical assemblages, and hence discourses. Each could be said to have varying degrees of visibility depending on their varying success in enrolling other participants around one account of the quakes over another. Smyth's film, released on wide screen and DVD, can be viewed as one such success.

To follow the mash-up of sociotechnical experiences and mediated narratives, we begin by situating *WACF* in relation to some general conceptual issues. We then outline events in Christchurch, using the film as both a probe and a narrative thread. This foregrounds the film as an oligopticon; one partial view of the city revealed through the mobile eye of the camera (Latour and Hermant). Simultaneously, we frame the film itself in terms of the documentary

genre of city symphonies. We do so to show not just how this genre frames Smyth's film but also how contemporary multimedia, unknown in the early legacy of this genre, reworks the genre itself. This also highlights what the film *can't* reveal, the invisible infrastructural damage – the technological unconscious (Thrift) – that silently bound the city together. This enables us to situate and discuss the multiple registers of urban formation and how these can, potentially, be reworked or rethought following the city's massive disruption. We do this particularly through discussion of Ash Amin's recent work on the urban social ("Good City", "Rethinking", "Collective Culture") and on the urban politics of the street. Taken together, all these sources foreground issues of public space, public imaginaries and how these are constituted through the machinic order of the city (Amin and Thrift "Cities", Latham and McCormack).

The film and the city

We start with the film as a visualized, mobile oligopticon. What do we mean by this? Foucault famously drew on Bentham's image of the panopticon: a means of surveillance where a central authority could monitor every activity of the citizens under its control. 'Pan' suggests total and complete coverage; to this, Latour counterposes oligo - an assemblage of parts, an image he drew on in his investigation of Invisible Paris. Here, the attempts to monitor traffic networks, or other forms of necessary surveillance, were only ever partial (Latour and Hermant).

The implications of this reformulation are radical. Theoretically, they point to the reworking of a debate more than a century old in the social sciences, between Durkheim's image of society as a whole social body, and Tarde's emphasis on the social as a collectivity, one formed out of fluid, networks of connections (Latour, Latour et al). Practically, the implications undo the inherently paranoid notion of a centralized, all-seeing authority in favour of the mobilization of networks of citizens, each with their own interest and partial views of the worlds they inhabit. Politically, they invoke a range of traditions, from Arendt to Foucault, which suggest how social groups constantly mobilize against, or in disregard of, state authorities in order to articulate and pursue their collective interests.

Technologically, the reformulation is radical in two ways. First, it foregrounds the often invisible alliances between humans and technologies that are essential to the creation of collective action. Second, it discloses how these sociotechnical networks shape human interaction. They shaped the boundaries of mediated interaction as individuals attempted to understand and manage what was happening to them. This could be through cellphones, blogs, emails, texts or even films such as *WACF*, but through technological limits – relying on car batteries to power cellphones in the absence of a power grid, or the resort to placards or notes when cell towers failed. What the earthquakes reveal is how the violent rupturing of these chains of sociotechnical connection leave the city's citizens vulnerable and disconnected. This is what Thrift describes as the technological unconscious: the software incorporated into systems of water, power, sewage, telecommunications systems that, invisibly, link and secure the city's daily, routine activity. Suddenly, the technological unconscious has become visible.

These inherently radical perspectives are central not only to Smyth's film but to all media portrayals of the city. Equally, they are central to understanding cities and their reconfiguration. Christchurch's experience highlights both of these because it tears open these otherwise routine and accepted assumptions and allows us to examine them freshly.

At the same time, it opens up significant questions about what we mean by a city in the process of having to rebuild it.

Following Latour, *WACF* is constituted – as all media visualizations are – out of a network of connections mobilized and articulated through what we see and hear on screen. It may appear, as media representations often purport to be, a 'global' view of Christchurch. Yet, a 'global' view on mass media is always partial: some suburbs, some personalities, some events, some accounts or narratives appear to represent all of the city that falls. The film illustrates the limited networks of connection particularly vividly precisely because it only articulates some aspects of Christchurch. Inevitably, it leaves viewers, particularly residents, noticing those features that were absent.

The film is partial in another, crucial aspect. It barely encompasses the machinic city; the complex infrastructures invisibly linking and organizing the city's daily, routine activity. We return to this later in the paper.

The City Symphony films

The City Symphony film is a recognised genre, but the conventions ordering such films have been continually reworked as the genre has travelled from Europe to North America and on to Asia and Australasia.¹ The European city symphony films of the 1920s (*Berlin, The Symphony of a Great City; The Man with the Movie Camera*) experimented with the artistic possibilities of film and montage. Ruttmann and Vertov present Berlin and Moscow as assemblages of circulating machines – trains, trams, cars, electric pylons etc - and mobile persons carrying out their daily activities of work and leisure. Ruttmann operated with the concept of a city as centred and everyday life as impersonal spectacle played out in the streets of the city. Vertov's film presents cinema as an art of the machine, an art of motion. For both filmmakers, cinema is a mediator of modern urban and industrial experience. But, as the making of such films shifts from Europe to North America, they increasingly focus on neighbourhoods and mundane everyday life rather than the iconic city centre. In a conventional sense the focus shifts from the 'macro' city to the 'micro' of the everyday as experienced by particular subjects / communities. In addition there is a shift from concealed surveillance camera(s) views from nowhere / everywhere (panoramas and close-ups used by Ruttmann and Vertov) to focusing on communities and following networks across cities. *A Bronx Morning* by Jay Leyda (1931) is an interesting, intimate contrast to the impersonal *Berlin* and *Man with a Movie Camera*.

Changes in technologies facilitate changes in film grammar and film space: the introduction of facial close ups, reverse angles; speech, music and voiceover, or subjects giving their point of view. These shifts, the same shifts that took place in ethnographic film, move the city symphony film from the point of 'construction' of the expert filmmaker / editor to the no less-constructed points of view of subjects and the complex spaces they inhabit (Adil, Shapins and Tsivian). This is how *WACF* works.

This expansion of what is documented by city symphony films points to the need to view them as experimental hybrid forms always improvising with the possibilities of the developing technologies of film. Similarly, the US documentary maker Pat O'Neill suggests the obvious: that the modern city is not simply a public space or a set of public spaces, but a concentration of particular private spaces as well (MacDonald 123).

Kinder extends this to O'Neill's concern with ecologies in the city symphony film. As she comments:

while the city symphony form has assumed that the city is a space that can be dealt with as basically separate from the country, O'Neill suggests what we know to be true: that every dimension of city life is made possible by alterations in the country that surrounds the city.

This antinomy is constantly implicit in Christchurch's relationship to the surrounding country, one itself damaged by the earthquakes. This evokes Kinder's opening reference to the contemporary city as "urban networks that are simultaneously local, regional, national and global, turning cities themselves into database narratives". Kinder's inclusion of databases and narratives points to the city as both a networked and mediated form, and it is this that is vividly portrayed in the way the film *WACF* follows earthquakes. The filmmaker is one among many followers of earthquakes. Earthquakes are mediated by different institutional forms of media.

The film and its public

What, then, does the film portray and how did it connect with its publics? We begin with another discursive form, a local blog, *Second Sight* to provide an adroit summary of the film and what it records:

Smyth starts from his inner-east Christchurch neighbourhood and works out. His [...] Christchurch is one where Piko [the alternative food store] and its surrounding shops were central and Merivale and Riccarton go unmentioned. Smyth weeps off-camera at the sight of the ruined Basilica, where he had once been an altar boy, and we note that his Christchurch is more Catholic than Anglican, generally bohemian and working class, or at least egalitarian.

It continues:

Smyth is not reporting the official lines or following the official timeframe. His is an earthquake story largely free of CERA, Bob Parker and Gerry Brownlee, one that focuses instead on community responses and individual ways of coping. Beyond Smyth's inner-east neighbourhood, the emphasis is on Avonside, Bexley, Aranui, Linwood and Lyttelton, with trips to Sumner and Kaiapoi. It is the Christchurch of Lianne Dalziel and Garry Moore, rather than [former Dean] Peter Beck – although Beck does appear briefly with his Anglican Cathedral – and Christ's College. The bigger picture, as reported in most media – events like the "share an idea" expo, or the red-zone land offers and insurance wrangles – has been deliberately overlooked in favour of smaller stories.

The film takes the form of a lament; a nostalgia for a past that has been destroyed. At the same time it celebrates the solidarity of the ordinary Christchurch residents. It is a peculiar version of a city symphony, as we discuss below: days in the life of a city in crisis rather than simply a city in motion, as city symphony films commonly depict. It was this crisis that eloquently communicated itself to a Kiwi diaspora. The first London screening was a major event, one warmly welcomed received back in Christchurch. The London premiere was in Brixton [TVNZ, "Kiwis Gather in London"]:

Hundreds of Kiwis have gathered in London for a charity film event to commemorate the Christchurch earthquake anniversary.

The Ritzy cinema in Brixton today hosted two sold-out screenings of a powerful documentary which follows the lives of those affected by the September, February and June earthquakes and ongoing aftershocks in Canterbury.

From Washington, a WACF Facebook writer reported:

There was hardly a dry eye in the auditorium, as NZ Ambassador Mike Moore presented the first US showing of the movie

Similar responses were reported in New Zealand itself. As Marti Duda commented on his blog:

I expected it to be a quickly-stitched together bit of overly-emotional drivel featuring badly-shot news footage. After seeing “*When a City Falls*” I realized I was wrong on all counts... The cinema was a very quiet place when the final credits rolled at the end.

Stuff.co.nz reported that ‘A feature documentary about the Canterbury earthquakes has finished its “phenomenal” 12-week run in New Zealand cinemas, where it outsold blockbusters, including the latest *Twilight* film.’ It quoted a local cinema manager:

It has done so well in Canterbury because we don't get to see ourselves on TV very often. We don't have *Piha Rescue* or *Shortland Street*. We don't get to see our neighbours on television as often as others. Television is all about Auckland.

It is an absolute thrill when people say it was cathartic for them and they cried from beginning to end and went home and had the best sleep for months.

A more personal blog on Ruth's Reflections ran this way:

Because Gerard [Smyth] is a neighbour there is considerable coverage of “our” corner, and nearby buildings. In one shot you can even see our purple cottage. Above all it's a film about the people, including quite a few I know personally.

Blogs are part of a flood of material, personal and public, responding not just to the film, but to the experience of the earthquakes. These have since been continuous on social media, from Twitter to Facebook, and in every other conceivable mediated outlet, whether Youtube, cooking manuals, podcasts, photography books, university student radio documentaries or polytechnic webcasts. It also includes the proliferation of visual mapping accessed constantly by residents on official sites such as Geonet, CERA, RebuildChristchurch, or Christchurch Quake Maps.

These accounts, a few of hundreds, highlight both the personal response to the events and the difficulties of creating a panoptic view of the city and its damage. The alternative, illustrated by Smyth's film, is an oligoptic one. But the blogs, too, are oligoptic, each piecing

together a shifting portrait of the city like an incomplete tapestry; one which, by definition, can never be entirely fixed or finished. Instead it is always provisional and partial.² Incidentally, our own account is equally oligoptic, because, as ethnographic researchers, we are subject to the same, partial constraints to those of our paraethnographic informants.

The Camera: The Mobile Eye

The position from which the 'truth' of the city can be seen is not that of human vision. It is a mediated position which a citizen can occupy only by becoming a viewer of televised events that provide access to a city centre now operating as a restricted zone or a retrospective account assembled from the records of a mobile cameraman in the form of a film.

The panorama is the 'poetic' view that the filmmaker exploits throughout the film. It is played off again and again against the destruction in the city streets and suburbs. The view mixes landscape - beaches, mountains and sea - and the cityscape of high rise buildings, streets and parks. This 'double' panorama effectively enhances the destruction of buildings and streets and the fear on the faces and in the voices of people. The film is therefore very different from the confident portrayal of the modern city presented in the city symphonies of Vertov and Ruttmann. This is a city in which people and machines have not subordinated nature. Here nature and the city remain entangled and the citizens remain vulnerable to unseen developments recorded on seismic charts but not visible to the eye or the camera. In this city the unknown remains central and the camera is unable to record everything. It is a city symphony film that records the folding of multiple times of nature, technologies and peoples.

The key to this process of making the film is chance encounters on the street. The filmmaker follows the earthquakes insofar as much of it is *live film captured on the day* when people did not know what was happening – it starts on September 4 with the first earthquake; includes the Boxing Day earthquake and then the February 22nd and June 13th earthquakes. All of these are filmed as they happen and we witness the response by people. Most dramatically, on and after February 22nd. It is at this point in the film that we see the destroyed city and the people assembling in Hagley Park and Cranmer Square, with many shots of people being rescued from buildings and walking out of the ruins. The sequences of Urban Search and Rescue workers continuing night and day with rescue and demolition reveals the day to be a ceaseless twenty-four hours.

It is people's words that provide the vocal accompaniment – the acousmetre (Chion) – as the film moves constantly from site to site (like Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*). It recalls Vidor's *The Crowd* in its use of long shots and how individuals are located against the background of the destruction. The Anglican and Catholic Basilica, along with other churches, many now demolished, feature throughout the film.

The temporal ordering of the film is given by the earthquakes that the filmmaker followed. Of course, 'followed' is important because the decision to make the film was not informed by what would happen on February 22nd. He cuts the film with scenes from Christchurch before the quake at the beginning – bicycling through Hagley Park, Cashel St Mall and elsewhere in the contemporary city and interpolates photographs of the pioneers building the city and the city in the 1950s. There is a sense of a time line – a linear time line of progress. This is imposed on living through and being in the earthquake that sets the city back; but the narrative is that 'we will go on', we have an opportunity. We will go on

because of the character of the 'ordinary' people and the practices of cooperation and community reaches across not just the city but the nation – buses from Wellington, guys down from Auckland; the Rangiora Express delivering food to the Eastern suburbs etc and the multinational USA. There is no sense that we will go on because we have good government or our leaders know what they are doing. John Key is featured once but he is being shown around – he does not speak for the nation.

Where was the city? The centre and the churches (the Arts Centre doesn't feature), High Street and the CTV building and then the constant movement across the suburbs – the eastern suburbs, Sumner and Lyttleton. Never in the west or at the university or in the north apart from one shot of a church spire coming down in Merivale. The filmmaker follows the damage, and the city we see is the damaged city, not the city as a whole. When we do see the city as a whole, repeatedly from the Port Hills, we don't know what is going on from these panoramic shots.

There is no necessary sequence to the shots, but rather an attempt to include a range of accounts and events (eg pulling down of London Street, Lyttleton) that take place across the city and suburbs. It is an effective capture of the city as a sensorium by a filmmaker moving through / a mobile camera recording in the streets, homes and parks of the city. And it is reinforced by city sounds: people's voices and music being played as events were filmed – the brass band at New Brighton, the folk singer at a gapfiller event, the folk song that ends the film. And the clever use of disembodied voices - police emergency calls at the start of the film and the occasional use of radio announcements to fix what is happening; and throughout the sound of ambulance and fire engine sirens piercing both day and night. And of course the sound of the earthquakes as they tore buildings apart and moved the ground.

The links between the shots are made through the use of intertitles announcing the dates of the earthquakes as they happened and the suburb that was being filmed. The filmmaker is heard questioning people occasionally and the film starts with his statement "I was born a few blocks from where I live now. This is my account of what happened here". This is an insider's view of the city as it ruptures across 2010 and 2011. At this point we are witnessing not the city but the setting of the city – sea, mountains, sheep, beaches and birds. It is a pastoral rather than urban setting that is presented. The film constantly poses the problem of how to capture a city on film.

Capturing the city

For instance, the film doesn't acknowledge that the city is composed of multiple shopping malls that serve as centres for the suburbs. It also excludes the airport but includes the port of Lyttleton, because the 'town' was badly damaged. It also excludes the chronic traffic jams that were a feature of the days after the earthquakes. The reasons for excluding these features of the city, places that Auge refers to as non-places, are not clear but it should be noted that inclusion would have compromised the pastoral theme of the film / city. This theme of a low density suburban city is very much an Australasian phenomenon.

The film captures the exploded assemblage of the city. The ruined roads, water flowing in the streets, liquefaction in the suburbs, destroyed and collapsed commercial and residential buildings, the dust, the broken pipes and cables, smashed cars and buses, all feature. The immediate consequence of the evacuation of the city into parks and squares and the fear

and anxiety this caused are also featured. The assembling of people in these sites was a potent sign of the city reconfigured.

The dominant image of the city and suburbs is one of people on foot, walking or running away from collapsing buildings and walking to and in parks. This is not a film about driving in the city or traffic chaos and yet this is what happened after the quake.

Fear, stress and anxiety, all carried in people's bodies and expressed concerns, are evident throughout the film.

Narratives

The film is composed of multiple narrative accounts of what happened. Individuals provide their accounts of the extremely variable event referred to as the earthquakes. These 'ordinary' individuals are spoken to in an opportunistic way by the filmmaker though he returns to three individuals – a geologist, baker and an older woman, a survivor – and updates their accounts; what has happened to them and how they view the events now.

The film corresponds to the argument that the city is more than its centre. By following the destruction through the suburbs it takes up the arguments raised by Merrifield ("Lefebvre", "Right") and Amin ("Good City"). The city is the collection of communities that have been incorporated into the 'imaginary' of Christchurch. So Christchurch is the original city centre but it is also the beach and hill suburbs. It is a particular imaginary.

In addition, the city is presented as multicultural with Pakeha, Asian and Maori all featured in different shots. The multicultural USAR rescue teams are also represented. Yet, this is one of the points at which the strains of assemblage – of mash-up – become evident. The film's ending gives voice to a Scottish planner concerned with sustainable cities but, as Peter Calder noted, it seemed jarring and platitudinous. Similarly, contrasting San Francisco, Portland and New Orleans appears as a gloss job. In these instances, the official view is presented with shots of conviviality across all three recovered settings. Arguably, this ignores the problems of Katrina and New Orleans (recently highlighted in another city documentary, Gary Hustwit's *Urbanized*, 2011) and over-estimates the changes in San Francisco and Portland. These points imply closure in an environment still far from settled.

Nonetheless, what the film provides is, in part, a series of snapshots, not just of places but of individuals and their lives. These range across diverse inhabitants; they're intrinsic to the mash-up created by the earthquakes.

Constructing the imagined city

The film represents the city as an imagined community - one in which the creative response of its citizens will rebuild a future. In this respect, it is a utopian film. In watching it, we don't always separate the real and virtual city; yet it also reflects something of Antonio Negri's perspective on cities (Obrist): "the construction of urban cooperation, in the liberty and the imagination of people who define and provoke it". Looked at generously that is what the film argues.

The other side of this is the city as (commercial) circulation, the reterritorialisation of the city in the suburbs; the creation of a polycentric city with a multiplicity of centres (like Los Angeles). A polycentric city was already one well advanced in Christchurch, with expanding

suburbs and new malls, and emerging satellite centres such as Rolleston and Northwood. It has been given a further push by the earthquake. This raises the issue of the city and public space. What constitutes a city: is it conserving a centre or can there be urbanity without a centre? The film oscillates, implicitly, around this tension in relation to how Christchurch is to be rebuilt.

Amin ("Rethinking" 109) writing of a different context comments:

This is the city revealed as a community of communities, held together by an extraordinary range of objects of political communion. The result is an urban political field of fragmented and invisible or materialized dispositions, one that requires active effort in constructing a local commons and a local public. There is no ready politics of local community to draw upon around the classical sites of city hall, public space or facial recognition. Instead, a politics of local attention is obliged to both visualize a specified urban commons (e.g. shared services or a particular urban ethos) and enrol many tools of political communion (from friendship circles to billboards and manifestos).

The film 'tells' us how drawing together these indivisible associations transforms the way we understand cities. The film is both unlike, and more than, a traditional city symphony in that it documents the urban / suburban region. The city centre is not named but the suburbs are named by use of intertitles. The city centre is not represented through officials: Bob Parker is featured a couple of times but not acknowledged as the Mayor, and is not speaking on behalf of the city. The suburbs are represented through (unnamed) 'ordinary' people talking about what happened to them or, as in the case of Lyttleton, through the destruction of London Street. The 'communities' of Kaipoi, Governors Bay, Heathcote Valley, Sumner are also included in the 'city'.

The filmmaker moves freely through space, interconnecting a number of story lines. Smyth's camera becomes the observant walker on the street in contrast to the voyeuristic 'panorama' that an anonymous flaneur enjoys - a distinction that de Certeau makes (157-158). The film's portrayal of an urban topography comes less from its very effective location shooting than from the simultaneity of interacting and contrasting incidents within an interconnected space that his crosscutting between places reveals. For instance he intercuts shots of people sleeping in tents in Aranui with shots from the porthills of the sky and the city below followed by shots of the city centre now emptied of people and destroyed. And among the destruction a single coffee cup and saucer left intact on a table outside of what was a café. The objects – cup, saucer and table – no longer connected to café and customer portray the consequences of the earthquake as well as the spoken word. The image concentrates the event and reveals the rupturing of associations, taken for granted. Such cross-cutting creates effects of tragedy and dislocation.

The editing produces an urban entity, a city and its suburbs; in the process it constructs a new patchwork of associations between people and things. This new patchwork cannot be seen, is not visible, from any one vantage, but is plotted by the co-ordination of many viewpoints, making a vast network of partial connections like the city itself. These parallel the narrative grids and hypertexts in Marsha Kinder's argument. But they also echo the kind of urban spatiality described by Dodge and Kitchin – the organization of code / space: how we 'read' the disordered spatial arrangements of Christchurch through the patchwork

constructed by the film. Or, for that matter, through the patchwork of other media forms and practices. These become the codes that organize residential experience.

Discussion: Amin, Urban Ethnography and WACF

Encounter

If we say the film is composed of multiple narrative accounts we can also say it is composed of multiple encounters. What we witness is film as a politics of encounters (Merriweather "Right", "City"). These encounters take place across an urban region and show the variability and difference promoted by the earthquakes – the community hall and brass band in New Brighton compared with the individual property owners 'defending' their property in the hill suburbs. The destruction of iconic buildings in the centre played off against water and liquefaction in gardens in the Eastern suburbs. Such encounters also echo debates within urban literature that reflect tensions around human and posthuman concepts of the city (Latham and McCormack). For example, Purcell refers to Lefebvre's influential arguments about the city, where he imagines a 'space of the street in which inhabitants encounter each other, interact meaningfully, and in so doing become aware of their differences and negotiate them together.' Yet, such 'right to the street' arguments are constantly confronted by the crushing infrastructure of capital: the very technological unconscious that shapes the organization of urban life (Merrifield "Right").

Thrown togetherness and Emergence

The filmmaker carried out what Amin proposes as the agenda for a new urban studies. Smyth follows the processes of spatial formation across the city, rather than, as Amin suggests, 'accepting pre-given orders of spatial arrangement'. In doing so, he shows how 'the combined energy of human and non-human vitality; is 'always rubbing against historically shaped territorial formations' ("Rethinking" 103-104).

Surrounding the film, occasionally glimpsed, is the disruption of the 'machinic order' of the city, 'whose silent rhythm instantiates and regulates all aspects of urban life'. This includes 'the delivery systems, protocols and codes of civic and public conduct that regulate the everyday social life of cities' ("Rethinking" 110). The implicit breakdown was reflected in curfews, then the emergence of burglaries, constant infringements of the red zone and cordons and numerous anecdotal accounts of property theft by salvage firms.

What the film documents is the surfacing of that technological unconscious in the different registers of fear, anxiety, confusion, commitment and purpose. It resulted, as Amin puts it, in 'the ontology of 'thrown togetherness', visibly manifested as 'the relatively unconstrained circulation of multiple bodies in a shared physical space', whether in Hagley Park or throughout the city as residents attempted to resecure their lives or property. This 'situated surplus'

included many activities that do not form part of an overall plan or totality, many impulses that constantly change the character of the space, many actants who have to constantly jostle for position and influence, many impositions of order (from buildings and designs to conventions and rules).

("Collective Culture" 11)

This has been the post-quake experience ranging from the demonstrations against the City Council or the RebuildChristchurch movement, to the constant attempts to restore local amenities, deal with insurance companies, and a variety of other agencies such as CERA or the Earthquake Commission. These collisions and confusions echo perspectives within recent urban studies literature but carry a different inflection. Amin, for example, summarises recent literature where he writes of the 'swirl of surplus matter in a given space', and how markets, squares, parks or housing estates create 'more than incidental impact on urban public culture'. Yet, the mingling he mentions of 'human and non-human in close physical proximity' and the way 'rhythms of invention, order and control are regulated by the pressures of this multiplicity' play out differently in Christchurch ("Collective Culture" 11).

Where they differ is in the intensities created by the earthquakes. These, as described, circulated around the lack of power, of sanitation, of water, of simple mobility, or of communication (Love, Edgington). This is where the film is concerned with the unpredictable. From the perspective of urban studies, this provokes, simultaneously, 'a process of ordering and disruption. Settled rhythms are constantly broken or radically altered by combinations that generate novelty' ("Rethinking", 12-13).

This has been, and continues to be, the post-quake and post-film experience: the emergence of container shopping and the CBD container mall, caravan and trailer outlets, congregations of temporary shopping precincts in the city's south; the conversion of churches and school halls to performance and concert venues, the creation of sports centres, the construction of a cardboard Cathedral and much more. Often, these have emerged against bureaucratic regulation as spontaneous, local solutions to the intractable problems of managing daily life. These constitute the 'throwtogetherness' that Amin describes as "Emergence":

While some of this novelty is the result of purposeful action, such as new uses and new rules of public space, emergence properly understood is largely unpredictable in timing, shape and duration ... constantly producing new rhythms from the many relational possibilities. This is what gives such spaces an edgy and innovative feel, liked by some and feared by others, but still an urban resonance that people come to live with and frequently learn to negotiate.

("Collective culture" 12-13)

As Amin observes, the atmosphere of a public space, 'its aesthetics and physical architecture, its historical status and reputation, its visual cultures, subtly define performances of social life in public and meanings and intentions of urban public culture' ("Collective Culture" 15). This is a dimension that WACF effectively conveys. It is also where the mourning over Christchurch's history has been mostly articulated, in and beyond the film: the loss of its old churches and cathedrals, its Edwardian architecture, the Lyttleton Timeball Station; its public buildings, whether these are its major hotels and spaces around Victoria Square, or the Town Hall, even Johnston's tiny grocery in Colombo Street or the AMI Stadium in old Lancaster Park. To deny this mourning, Amin emphasizes, is to neglect the power of symbolic projection, working at the interface between public culture and public space: 'the design of space, public gatherings, the shape of buildings, the cleanliness of streets, the sounds and smells that circulate', all of which come with 'strong sensory, affective and neurological effects' ("Collective Culture" 15). Instead, when residents now walk the central CBD, it is to be bereft of these evocative markers of old colonial

Christchurch: the empty, flattened city blocks have erased a shared, personal and collective life, whatever the postcolonial future may hold.

The shots of the Lyttleton ceremony held in the street one week after the February 22nd earthquake portray this atmosphere – the mix of official and popular responses to the events. The camera scans the faces of those who stand in silence to commemorate those who died one week earlier. The Anglican vicar who led the ceremony then declaimed forthrightly:

let me tell you Holy Trinity's bell will ring again over our village, waking all you bloody lot up at 10 o'clock every morning.

Conclusion

Over a year has passed since WACF was released. At the time of writing, there are more signs of demolition than of rebuilding. The CBD is now almost unrecognizable, even to long-term residents. The whole city has become mired in complex local politics, including marches and demonstrations, and interminable bureaucratic wrangles between individual residents and the EQC, insurance companies, CERA and the City Council. The city's focus has shifted from the ongoing seismic upheavals of the first eighteen months to the massive social and urban reconfigurations that have come in their wake. This includes the Christchurch Rebuild where a government blueprint threatens to remove property rights from central city owners. This action has led to well-publicized claims of a 'landgrab' and of state profiteering on disaster in ways that have uncanny echoes with the issues raised by Lefebvre and Merriweather ("Blueprint"). As writers, one of us is caught between his insurance company and the EQC over the issue of payment for repairs to both his house and its foundations. The other has numerous friends and colleagues struggling with liquefaction, lumpy roads, limited amenities and a sense of despair that normality will return in their lifetime. These are the mundane faces of the conceptual issues we have traversed. This is the daily, lived reality of mash-up.

This mundane reality raises numerous issues in terms of the popular politics around the reconstruction. So doing, it mobilizes, again, all the issues of narrative grids, hypertexts, the machinic order and public imaginaries. Merriweather writes recently, for instance, of how to sustain a politics of the street: 'how to sustain the intensity of the encounter, how to harmonize it with a continuous political evolution, with an authentic politics of transformation?' ("Right" 475).

His conclusion is for people 'to become space by acting. Nothing is scenic anymore, nothing is necessarily urban; nothing is frill or redundant, alienating or thing-like' (475). But this has to be confronted by Kinder's reminder about political action in the context of highly contested turf wars; and by the estimated \$15 billion of capital poised to pour into the city's rebuild. Add to which is the sheer exhaustion of ordinary citizens faced with ongoing insurance battles, or relocation, let alone the accumulated trauma of their experience, recalled every time there is another significant aftershock.

These themes were highlighted in a *Sunday Star Times* editorial in September 2012. Commenting on big protests against the state's merger of numerous Christchurch schools, it proclaimed:

Taking to the streets is a way of making yourself heard in a vacuum. A way of finding a voice in a city where many feel mute; a way of taking to your feet where many feel hamstrung; a way of fighting the inertia of bureaucracy (“Game on”).

In this context, Smyth’s film, and the numerous videos, audios, blogs, podcasts and broadcasts by ordinary citizens reveal alternative ways such a broken, ‘munted’ city might be reassembled. This is by combining the numerous, partial views of each individual recorder - of the oligopticons mentioned earlier. These may become mobilized as collective action through the cumulation of myriad, diverse networks that, under certain conditions, coalesce into public assembly.

This returns us, again, to two issues. First, that to follow this halting, uneven process requires a practice of cross-disciplinary attention that traces the intersection of numerous, intersecting and unforeseeable lines of force and flight (Deleuze and Patton). Such a tragic upheaval cannot be reduced to a single disciplinary purification that would do violence to the very processes under investigation. Consequently, we have proposed that media studies takes its place alongside other social science disciplines as a way of making sense of this devastating experience.

Second, the reassembling of discourses about Christchurch, as we’ve suggested, is always a mediated process, one which continues to create constantly shifting networks. This, in turn, reconstitutes the idea of public space, not as a stabilised place but as a proliferating, mutating, sometimes threatened one: one that exists online as much as in a geographic location. Recent examples include TC3 Information or UC QuakeStudies. Such an image of public space also suggests it is some distance from Habermas’ sober idea of public discourse. This is because the discourses are articulated through social and online media – tweets, tags and blogs – as personalised, sometimes gossipy, popular, interactive exchanges that fit Tarde’s description of how public discourse is created and disseminated (“Tarde”). It is these shifting currents that constitute the narrative grids and hypertexts that are part of the struggle over what the new urban environment of Christchurch is to become.

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Notes

¹ There is an extensive literature on the City Symphony as a historical and current form; this is aside from a further literature on the Cinematic City. As instances of the first category, see Beattie (“City Symphony”), Shapins and Tsivian (2008) or, for discussion of other variations on the form see, for example, Beckett on “City Scherzos & Huang Weikai’s *Disorder*.” For the Cinematic City (where the symphony form is not central) see, for example, Adil, Brunsdon or the “Media Resources Center”.

² Latour and Hermant (1998) ‘from the entire Paris set in one view to the multiple Parises within Paris, which together comprise all Paris and which nothing ever resembles. The proliferation of computer technology makes this invisible Paris describable at last.’

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